The Beat Within

THE BEAT WITHIN ▪ A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF WRITING AND ART FROM THE INSIDE ▪ VOLUME 12.28

The TV I watch focuses on hatred and poverty,
Murders and robbing is all the camera sees.
The TV that is always on, it never stops,
The TV that is on cannot be bought,
The TV of true life is the TV I watch!

read the rest of Giovanni's POW on page 12

In this special issue, check out:

- The initial writings from Clark County, Nevada
- The Lastest installment from Project WHAT!
  Stories from young people with incarcerated parents.
- The initial writings from the "Strong And Open Minded" girls in Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Center
- And more writings from the "Land Of Enchantment" New Mexico

It's late Monday night, well actually it's Tuesday early afternoon now, and this editor was determined last night to get a good chunk of this editor's note complete, given tomorrow is here, it's time to reread and edit this pure spillage of words.

As usual, it's a challenge, to say the least, in getting the issue complete. Unfortunately we will not get to all the 12.28 pieces for this issue. A number of units will have to wait until next week's 12.29 issue to see the light of day. So please hang in there writers! With our current crew of editors, it has definitely been a challenge to get these latest issues out and into your hands We are all doing our best, but of course our best still cannot cover every single unit. Apologies again go out to you writers who were looking forward to seeing your pieces this week. Let's aim for next week. If you wrote something meaningful — which, unfortunately, not all of you do — we hope soon enough you will be pleased to see your work in print!

Yes, we are continuing to cut a chunk of pieces that don't have a lot of soul/heart in the effort, and appear to have been written in between the gossip sessions a number of you have during the workshops. We can't figure out how you can only come up with a few sentences in the hour session, and then have the nerve to complain about why you don't see you piece in The Beat Within! This isn't about us talking mess to you young writers, but if you can't take this valuable session serious, then why should we bother printing your mess? It is so simple to write a decent piece for The Beat Within. You don't need to be Shakespeare, all you need to do is be honest with yourself and come real on any of our topics. Don't tell us every week you can' t feel our topics, that's a straight cop out! If anything, our topics are challenging you to take a good long look at yourself and write something personal if you can, or keep it vague, but show that you are taking the period serious. In the end, you will be published and most likely you will touch a number of readers too! It's time a number of you stop the chillin' and get busy with getting and then spreading the knowledge!

Allow this editor to thank the following editors who show great heart each week in taking on their units and respond accordingly with love and respect. Praise to the powerful and thoughtful Siliva Mortenson who — in between his full time job, college and family — finds time to edit and respond to numerous pieces/units. A big thanks to Jen Clarke who, after a long day/week at her paying gig, also finds a chunk of time to respond to her Alameda County workshop unit and, by the way, is one amazing volunteer who has come a long way. Then there's Neela Banjeree who is new to The Beat team, but has been a solid editor and youth advocate on the YO! Youth Outlook side of things. She has stepped up big time in conducting workshops and editing her San Jose girls' unit. Also there is our colleague Pauline Craig, who plays a key role in editing her Marin and San Francisco units in a timely manner. Can't forget Dennis Morton who keeps getting better with his timely edits for the Santa Cruz and the Santa Clara writers. Then there is long time colleague Sheerly Avni, who if she had it her way would not only edit but would type up every single piece, who has done a stellar job with the edits. Over the last several plus months she has taken on a chunk of editing for Alameda County.

What about Will Roy! Primetime! He puts together the mighty BWO each week and does a hell of a job! How 'bout those intros he gives the BWO writers? Excellent! Lastly, there's Michael Kroll who is the key editor, or should we say "key," especially when it comes to San Francisco and San Mateo County edits. Every single one of these editors are vital to the success of each Beat publication. Now if we could score a few more editors and a few more dollars, we'd be in great shape. But until then we'll have to hit and miss with a number of units that do not have prime time editors yet. We knew this period would be a challenge, but overall we think we are doing an amazing job!

On another note, we just learned that San Mateo is not happy with The Beat Within. Their Probation Department thinks we have broken our promise with the juvenile hall (to deliver only the writing of San Mateo's juvenile prisoners, and not expose them to our other writers...) We disagree. The school department, where we have conducted our workshops for over ten years, asked us to bring in several "big" Beats each week (the complete Beat that every other county participates in) for the school and the library. Since this hall is not supportive of The Beat publication, but only wants us to feature the writings of their young people in an insert, we have been doing just that for more than a year in order to give this incarcerated population an opportunity to write and see their writing published.

Well, unfortunately, one of The (big) Beats was taken out of the school and/or library, found by a counselor on the unit, who then reported this finding, and now the hall wants to meet with us, accusing us of breaking our promise, which we didn't. (If there was a security breach, it belongs squarely in their jurisdiction and not in ours). In truth we do not want to meet. We have honored our agreement and don't feel The Beat needs to be defended against attacks that show a complete lack of understanding of this fine publication, and a complete lack of support for one of the best juvenile hall programs around!

We hope we are wrong and the school tightens up its security. Our biggest advocate, Hillcrest English teacher Jane Mortenson has left for the summer, and of course, all this happened when she was gone. (We don't believe she would have let this situation get to this point if she had been there; in fact, we don't think the big Beat would have been taken if she had been there...) We'll write an email to the powers that be and see if we can mend this situation or get some feedback. It would be such a shame if The Beat Within would be cut from programs, due to one young person bringing a Beat onto the unit. (And, anyway, why shouldn't these young people have the same access to The Beat that every other youngster in the Bay Area enjoys?) Fingers are crossed.

On an exciting note we have several specials in this issue, one being the first installments from our young writers in Las Vegas aka Clark County Juvenile Justice Department. We also have the first installment from the "Strong And Open Minded." They are the young women from the Osborne School in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. And that's not all! We have our second installment from the Project WHAT! Tales from young people with incarcerated parents. Since we are on this tip of specials, allow us to mention we have some great pieces from our buddy Steve Serna's group of young writers over at the Land Of Enchantment in Bernalillo County New Mexico!

Ok, lets get this show moving right along, praise to all you writers. Allow us to take the next few paragraphs to tell you what our topics were in our workshops before the writers sprung into action with their pencils.

Our first topic, "My Tree Will Look Like..."

All of us lay the groundwork for our futures by committing to ideas, beliefs, and even materials that eventually give us results, either positive or negative. Imagine that the things we commit to are the seeds we've planted, and what we've experienced thus far are our roots. From these seeds and roots, a tree will grow. What will your tree look like? If you've planted seeds by posting on the block every day, tell us what your tree will look like. Or, if you planted a seed in the soil of education, with roots leading to your high school diploma, what would that tree look like? Be as creative as you can: From the seeds I've planted, my tree will look like this...

The second topic, "If I Were You And You Were Me" –

If we could change places, what do you think you might learn about us and our lives, and what could we learn about you and your lives? Try to think outside the box of your own experience to consider what the lives of others might be like, and how their experiences might have shaped a different "you," and how your experiences might have shaped a different "them."

Our last topic, "I Turned On The TV And I Saw... "

When we watch TV, we all flip through the programs with our remote control in hand. Some of us only a few channels to choose from while others have hundreds. Television plays a huge role in most of our lives — it's in our homes, it's in the jailhouse, and for some, it's even in our hand-held phones. Our question to you is, when you turn on the television what do you see? Or, don't see? Or would like to see? Be creative, but be honest. What is it like for you when you turn on the TV?

All right readers, this issue goes out to the mighty young interns who have graced our office and have stepped up as typists this summer. Thank you. Also to the powerful young people in San Mateo County who may suffer a loss of The Beat Within, due to one poor choice of a young person who decided to take The Beat publication out of the school — and the lack of support by staff for a program that can only help. We can only hope we will continue to touch lives through our weekly workshops and give the young people the power to shed light in their words and in their art. We're thinking good thoughts for all. See you next week friends. Hopefully by then we will have a new home run king by the name of Barry Bonds. We shall see!

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At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Volunteers: Rebecca Wahlgren, Elizabeth Crawford, Jen Zimmer, Sarrah Babcock, and Morghan Velez Young.

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www.thebeatwithin.org

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From The Beat: Early last year, The Beat Within was invited to a the JPAI juvenile justice conference in New Orleans. Besides the founder David Inocencio speaking, two of our most gifted young associates, Perry Jones and Will Roy, also got up and spoke before a big audience about their lives, about what writing and The Beat Within means to them. One person in that audience was a man named Steven Graham, a probation officer from Clark County, Nevada who was inspired enough by their message to invite The Beat Within out to meet some of the minors in his care. Though we have to say – there was nothing "minor" about these young writers at all. Major talent, major heart, and a major appreciation for the publication in their hands, and it was 115 degrees on the day long time Beat colleague Sheerly Avni met them! We are very proud to publish the pieces they wrote, and we are hoping to see the young voices from Las Vegas in future The Beat Within punlications! We learned so much from reading these stories – about Las Vegas police, about how So Cal gang life is spreading East, and mostly, about how much ALL our young people have to offer as teachers... all over this country.

Missin' San Diego

Missin' San Diego with all of my soul
Comin' to Vegas and gettin' caught up doesn't make me feel whole no mo'
Ditched my friends and ditched my family
For a couple flags and a beautiful caddie
Now, sittin' in my cell and reminiscin' for hours
Shakin' my head and wonderin' why I left Diego
Now I realize I had made a mistake
And the easy way out is what I am going to take.
So when I get released and I'm on the outs
I'm goin' to remember your real friends and family is all that counts.

-Daygo Boi

I'm not trying to justify myself violating my probation, but you know there are some of us individuals that are truly sorry for what they have done and those that are just going to go out and do it all again.

Vegas

I arrive in Vegas and set up shop in an unfamiliar place
Thinkin' to myself I'm gonna catch another case
I go out with the "homies" later that night
And to my expectation, yep, we get into a fight
Knuckles pound against bone and guns go off loud
Every head ducks for cover in the enormous crowd
We dip to the caddie as fast as we can.
I hear sirens in the distance, Oh SHHH! It's "The Man"
We start up the car and peel out of the lot.
Now we are panicking because a bunch of kids have been shot.
We got onto the road but our ways have been blocked
Four or more policemen are pointing at us with their pistols cocked
Sittin' in my cell, tears drippin' down my face
Wishin' I never came to this place.

-Daygo Boi

I Don't Know How

In ten years I don't really see myself, and I don't know how I'm going to turn out. I'm not sure if I'm going to be in jail or not, but a lot of Vegas kids might be dead or in prison.

Vegas is a small place but we got everything everybody else got and more. I wanna be a person with a lot of money ten years from now, but the way I'm going, I don't see how that's going to work. I want to change the way I am but I don't know how, and sometimes, I don't want to.

The people that I must love are my family, they help me when I need help but sometimes I don't' want help. They want me to change just as much as I do. They know that the way I'm doing will have me in and out of jail, but when they tell me I' doing wrong, I don't want to listen, and I don't try to listen. I don't think I would change anything about my life, I ain't got the best life, but I think I've been doing good. I'm most proud of my mom because she's always been there for me, for when ain't nobody else gonna be there. She took care of me when she was all alone with no help from nobody. That's why I'm most proud of her.

-Shad

How I Feel Inside

You see, this is the first time I've ever broken my probation and now I'm paying for it. Now I have to spend the last six months that I had to be a kid and enjoy being a teen in a camp on a mountain, away from my family, away from my pregnant girlfriend (which I should be taking care of with my life) and away from the people that I care about and who care about me. For what? Violation of probation? A false battery charge?

I see people come here every day with serious gun charges and other serious charges, and they basically get slapped on the hand and let go. There is also young men in here that have violated probation seven and eight times and they're finally getting committed. I'm not trying to justify myself violating my probation, but you know there are some of us individuals that are truly sorry for what they have done and those that are just going to go out and do it all again. As for myself, this is the first time that I ever made it past booking, and If I could do it all again, I would be out there working, studying for my GED but most importantly I would be taking care of my unborn child and its mother.

I would be a man, but as it stands, yes I think being locked up has helped me. It has helped me to realize that I have responsibilities that I have to take are of as a young man. Six months probably doesn't sound like that long to whoever is reading this, but to me it is half of a year that I can't take care of my responsibilities, so it's hard for me to deal with it. But I have no choice but to do so. I'm not writing to make people feel sorry for me, but as a message for our teen nation to think before you act, especially if you have people that you care about.

So, has being in a cage helped me?

Completely. The Jessie that you're hearing right now is a completely different person. People that are truly sorry for what they have caused should get one last chance to prove that they can do what's right. Under supervision of course, but that's how I feel.

-Jessie

My Life in Los Angeles

Hello people. I'm a fifteen-year-old teen that was born in Lynwood, California and raised in one of the craziest hoods in LA. I was raised in Watts and lived there for thirteen years. Mom and dad were both involved in gangs, and my dad was one of the guys who started one of the big gangs, in 1981. My mom was also in this gang.

Me being raised in Watts was hard, because rival gangs would pass through our street, mostly every day, and do drive-bys. My dad's gang was the one that I seen making all the money in the hood when I was a young kid. When I was eight years old I used to be throwing up our sign. I remember when my dad would always be on the ruff with a gun. To go through the block without getting shot at, you have to blink your light three times before entering the block.

In 1996, my dad got killed by another gang, and in 2003 my mom moved us to Las Vegas to start a better life. After we moved to Las Vegas, I felt good. Very good, knowing that no one was after my family. My mom and dad both used to be on meth, and that is one of the reasons I never tried meth – because I know what drugs do to you.

I remember as a little boy praying and crying to God to get my mom off of drugs. That is why I'm never going to do meth. I'm glad we moved to Las Vegas. When we moved here my mom stopped using drugs. I'm very happy my mom has been clean from drugs for four years.

That's my story growing up in LA.

-Giovanni

This Is Not How I Want It

The way I live my life is not how I want it. I always tell myself don't get caught up, don't be involved with cops. Cops always find me. If I'm chillin' at the homies' crib, cops show up. They always say we're resisting when we're not. I got locked up for a month, but it's nothing compared with California.

I was living in Long Beach. That didn't turn out so well because my brothers are both older than me, and they grow up hard. Single mom, no control over us, we just went crazy. She thought it was because of where we were living at the time. She was right – when we moved to Vegas, it was nothing like California. I just chilled back, and I was doing the opposite from what I had been doing in California.

But then I got in with the wrong crowd, and everything was downhill. Everything was so easy, getting money, everything was simple. The best part is that you don't get robbed if you got that California instinct. You know which ones are trying to rob you because they are always paranoid. After everything, a lot of the things get boring.

One thing that could never get boring is the girls. There's ones that look fine and then there's some that look ugly. Some things that are messed up about Vegas cats is that most of them are fake. So all I do is kick back and smoke weed.

The way I see it is that I'm doing good, but I could do a lot better.

-Steven

Single mom, no control over us, we just went crazy. She thought it was because of where we were living at the time. She was right – when we moved to Vegas, it was nothing like California.

No Fun And Games

Vegas is known as Sin City. People think Vegas is a place of fun and games but they do not look at it from my point of view. Vegas is not a game. Vegas is a game of banging in my hood, and people get killed.

-Frank

How I Started Getting In Trouble With The Law

One day I broke into an abandoned house and through a ditching party, and the cops showedup and we all got caught. Then I had to go to court and before I went to court I got caught shooting out someone's car window.

When they drove by and then I also got caught with weed. Then when I went to court and the judge said he was going to detain me for the day, then the judge said I had to go to drug court. Then I got caught with a couple dirty urine samples. Finally a couple months later I did get another felony when I stole a car and got caught, and now look where I am: I'm going to Spring Mountain.

-Cody

Gang Bangin'

My OG homies put me in the gang I'm in. Sometimes I lay in bed and think about the time that I first got shot at, shot a gun and a lot. But people don't realize that the person that jumped you in the gang will have no remorse for you when you on earth and when you leave. It's like y'all are like brothers when you alive but when you die, they say they words and don't think about you no more. Most people join gangs because they need protection, fellowship, leaders, gun money, free drugs, and females that love the life you livin'. I experienced robbery with a gun to my head because the life I was living instead of givin' I was takin'.

I'm 15 but my life is like I'm a grown man. I see people get killed in my face, homies died from gang bangin'. To tell you the truth I had people in my set or gang that I seen that died the next day... I never knew him or her, but went to the funeral and paid my respects but after a couple of days I forgot I went. One day I was sitting on the couch at my OG homie's house and he said on the phone, "I got this young boy right here ready to kill something."

But that showed me that we the youth of gangbangin' is used like slaves to kill, rob, kidnap, anything that your gang members want you to do. So my word I'm trying to say is don't be a follower be a leader. Leadin' will get you to being in a better life than gang bangin'. I try to recruit all my homies because it's nothin' but killing. My dad started a gang in Louisiana... and that was what I followed.

So listen to the knowldege, not the false missed lead, and carry on.

-Jerry

From The Beat: We are extremely honored to have the first of a three-week series of writings from the powerful girls in Unit G2 in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. This is all made possible thanks to the Osborne School Department, particularly their teacher, Ms. Bernadette Neizvestny. It is our motto the more voices and collaborations the better and this is what we have, a mutual respect for the great work of teacher, Bernadette Neizvestny and her deep understanding of the power of The Beat Within. We want to officially welcome the "Strong And Open Minded" girls of Santa Clara County to the pages of The Beat Within. With that said we encourage you to read the intro, "Strong And Open Minded," from Bernadette Neizvestny, she will give you the 4-1-1 on how this collaboration evolved into this special!

My Past, Present and Future

In my past, my life was about chillin', drinkin', and blazin' it up. I used to love smoking that bomb, smoking out my people, matching with them or them smoking out me. I was always fighting, smoking with pride, celebrating with my homies. Violating probation but now days I'm at home with my man, staying out of trouble and taking care of business, trying to do right.

If it wasn't for my man I would probably be out doing what I do. Smashing on them foo's but no, that's not me anymore. The reason I stopped fighting is because when I would see my man arguing or acting out, I didn't like it, I would get worried. So I decided to stop so I could be a good influence on him. Instead of telling my man not to fight, I had to stop fighting myself so I can show him to do right. I knew I had to stop fighting otherwise I would be a hypocrite. So I gave up chillin to be with my man. I started to spend more time with him and grow to know him more.

Another thing I gave up was smoking weed. I put it out of my life because for some weird reason I would feel guilty for smoking with him. Every time I would be high with him, I would feel like I let him and his family down. In my head I would feel like I failed, I would tell myself I was a bad girlfriend for contributing to his bad habits.

I decided, I love him more than getting high so I believed it was only right to give up getting high to help him. In all honesty, I hated letting him get high, but I let him, so he would be happy. I would feel like he was only happy when he was high. I felt like I couldn't even make him happy anymore. I even started to feel that weed was more important to him that I was. I realized I gave up a lot to workout our relationship and so should he.

Well now I'm trying to do well, do my time, fix every big or little problem with my man. I'm hoping that when I get out he has the courage to change. When I look into my past I see no other guy that meant this much to me. I wish my man only knew how I feel. It's hard for me to tell him how I feel because sometimes when I try to tell him he tells me what I'm saying is a lie. Even when I cry he tells me my tears are fake, I don't want him to feel bad I just want him to know how I feel. I also want him to believe that everything I tell him is real. I want to be able to open up my heart and let him know how I feel.

I'm hoping we can have a better future and not to let the past tear us apart, but let it make us stronger. I can see me and my man with a happy future ahead of us. I'm hoping that I can get a good job and raise a happy family; I can see me as a good mother with a good job and a cozy little house, and a supporting husband.

-Elizabeth

Strong And Open Minded

When I first started working as a teacher for the girls unit in juvenile hall, I was very impressed with how expressive they were, individually and as a group. No matter what the topic, almost every girl in class had something to say, sometimes profound things to say. They are a creative group, at times too creative, and they work hard when they focus. I wanted to get to know them better and hear what they had to say about their experiences, try to see their life through their eyes. So, I had them write. I had them reflect. Together, we brainstormed topics and narrowed them down to two. The first topic was "Street Life" and the second was "Sex, Drugs, and/or Violence".

One of the girls brought in a copy of "The Beat Within", as I read through the magazine, a light bulb went off in my brain. I thought what a great avenue for their stories. Most of these girls have a harsh reality and they are trying to do the best they can with what they know, but sometimes there are circumstances beyond their control that make them feel as if there is only one choice to make whether it be living the street life, "bangin", being around and/or a part of violent situations, using drugs or sex to escape their everyday life. They told me that even though they admit what they did was wrong, some were sorry, some were not, but most felt that they would continue to do whatever it was they were doing when they got out which had them locked up in the first place. For some, it was a matter of choice, they "won't stop". For others, they felt, because of family or peer pressure that they can't stop. This is why we are using the phrase, "Can't Stop, Won't Stop" as a title for one of our pieces. Personally, I think there is hope. And I will hope for them until they see it for themselves. One of my girls said it best, "Change has to be a personal choice. No one can change your life for you. You have to do it for yourself". So, until then, I will keep them writing, reflecting, and guiding them toward positive healthy choices.

-Bernadette Neizvestny, Teacher
Osborne School, Santa Clara Juvenile Hall

When You Realize

Sometimes I don't understand how hurting or talking down upon someone, can make a person feel good about themselves.

` I have come to realize that we are all incarcerated as youth together which in reality makes us all equal.

Under all of our circumstances we already hurt being away from our families and people that actually really care about our feelings and us as people. On top of that we are put with a so-called, "family" of girls that are alike, but at the same time different.

I have also come to realize that a person's weakness and strengths show in actions which determine someone's character. In our terms, you either get a bad reputation or good and that determines who you are and gives people a right to treat you as they feel you categorized yourself.

In my opinion people who are quick to judge someone's faults have imperfections and insecurities within themselves and tend to become hateful people toward their peers and talk negative about them to take the focus from others off of them and onto another, in translation a cover up.

What I am now coming to understand is that no matter the wrong I did to my family they are still standing by me and they do not judge my faults in life and as a person, and accept me no matter who I am and what I did.

I am now hurting just as they did when I choose to be on the streets, hangin' with people I thought were my friends, but I thought wrong.

Now that I have a solid person to help me when I fall, those "friends" show me their faults. To me a true friend is someone that encourages you and does not judge you and sticks by you through thick and thin. Now that I am sitting here I have realized that I depend on my dad. He has taught me to be strong and to every negative situation there is a positive outlook.

In conclusion, those are my thoughts and lessons I have learned about being incarcerated as youth in the system full of people that don't care, that is one simple but complicating word, REALITY.

-Amber

I Am What I Am

Allow me to extend my utmost love honor and respect to The Beat and Beat readers. I hope everyone's doing coo' and all is well, despite our current situation. Pues in my unit we got this new teacher. Man she's so positive with us, we all like her. She's different than the other teachers we've had instead of throwing assignments at us, she asks us what interest us and we do it. She reminds me of "The freedom writers" teacher. If you don't know what the freedom writers it you should see the movie.

Well, we told her about The Beat and she decided that as a class we should pick a topic and write our perspective on it. And put it in The Beat as a class. So here's my piece, it's about my experiences, life lessons, goals, and the gang life.

Pues, I guess it started out when I was about 11 years old. I remember when my older brother would be kickin' it with their homeboys at my pad; I always wanted to be around them. When it came to chillin' with them I was like white on rice! I would always walk up to them and I would post up with my chest out and my feet a certain way. I picked up their habits the way they walk, talk, stand, and even sit. I started drinkin anything and everything I could get my hands on and that would get me drunk. I started smoking bud and I started gang banging too.

I remember the first time I got drunk, I was shhh-faced. My brother and their homeboys bought some beer and told me "drink up youngster," so me being me I took advantage of this opportunity and got shhh-faced. I remember the first time I got high and the first time I got into a fight. I was raised with nothing but boys, so I was always treated like a boy. They always told me, "If you cry, you're a bitch", "If you can't fight, you won't survive", they also still tell me "If you get in a fight and lose, don't even bother coming home". They raised me to be a solid warrior. My uncles, older homeboys/homegirls, and bothers schooled me down. They taught me right from wrong, the difference between me and you. They always said "Remember you don't have to prove yourself to anyone, never walk with you head down or shoulders slumped, always keep you hear at level and you shoulder square, don't underestimate anyone, respect all no matter what unless given a reason not to do so and never talk shit unless you can back it up"

You know for a homegirl coming up in this world is hard, because a lot of people underestimate me, most being the homeboys. The fact that I'm a female was why they would talk down to me and say that I couldn't do this or do that. But over the past years those who would talk down to me they grew to respect me. The way I look at thing and my life is different then other.

For example, if I run up on a guy and hit him or call him out, I expect him to put up a fight, no holding back. It doesn't matter if I'm a girl or I'm young, if I act or talk like a vato, I can get hit like one! I've gotten jumped by a couple of guys, them being my rivals. I get refreshed by my primos and homeboys all the time. To me it's no big deal.

I was fifteen when I got baptized into the hood. I was and I still am the baby in the hood. Lots of people look down at those who are in gangs and who are gang bangers. I personally think everyone's the same, but we all live different lifestyles. And this happens to be mine. I've lost a lot of my homeboys/homegirls to this life. We never know what's going to happen in this life. One minute I can be kickin' it and the next minute I could be on my back with bullet holes. I like to play at my own risk. But it's hard seeing your homies or even family pass away. I hurt a lot because of It, I just don't show it, but when they take out one of mine we take out ten of theirs. Rest in paradise to all those homeboys/homegirls we lost in this life.

Majority of people who look down on me don't even know me but often state, "she's going nowhere and she won't amount to anything in life," well straight off the bat that's bullshhh! Just because I gang bang doesn't mean I can't go to school or get a job. I go to school and I've had jobs and currently looking for one. I've got plans for my life that I will follow through with! I got plans to go to a college, get my own pad, a good paying job, so I can support my mom and others who are struggling! No I don't plan to stop gang banging, but I can't tell the future. But to me I could care less what people think of me because they don't exist in my life I say "screw 'em all, watch 'em fall!"

Until next time, your homegirls out. With mucho love, honor and respect. Stay up to all...

-Jessica

Caught Up Deep In The Game

There's this boy I know who used to do good
Rapped up in school work never thought about the hoods
'Till one day homies from the streets turned him out to gang violence
Now when you walk down the streets he's part of the riots.
Now he's caught up to deep in the game
He's known for gang banging, drug dealing, and so much more
His momma's tears are like bullets hitting the floor every time he walks out the door
His life goes on and now he has a kid
So he looks back at everything he did
But still he chooses to have people dead
There's no changing what he has set in his head
That's just the mentality he has cause that's the life he chose to live.
So now people want to frame him, having him go to juvenile hall for murder
But he gets out with time done because he had a good lawyer
But once he gets out he goes back to the gang life
Walking down the street with a .22 Remington rifle at his waist just to stay alive
His family is now telling him he should change his life for the better,
maybe get himself a wife
Well as he stays locked up for a long period of time
He realizes he's throwing away his life
He learns about his African culture and how his generations been treated
So he chose to go down that path to learn and do right, but to the set he's still dedicated
He now lives and fights for his rights
He also wants his kids to live a good life
No more drive-bys, drug dealing in the house
He doesn't even talk like a gangsta no more
He learned to watch his mouth
He respects his family and the things around him
He takes care of the family, he sees them as his peddle and he's the stream
He holds them up and he provides for them
He now puts his family first and everything else second
But going back to the other side of his life
He's still on parole and carries a knife
Ends up being incarcerated but in a more secured facility, prison is what they call it
Surrounded by nothing but security
Now he waits behind bars, seventeen to life
Hoping he gets paroled so he could go home with his kids and wife
As he sits in there and now counting days
The only things now that his family could do is hope and pray!

-Davinna

From The Beat: We want to welcome back to our pages, the second in a series from Project WHAT! There is plenty to say, and we are honored that their Program and Policy Director, Anna Wong has so kindly written the following intro to explain her program and her work with us many Beat readers, and has so kindly allowed us to reprint the young people's pieces in The Beat Within. We hope you like! We are republishing Anna's intro from last week. Welcome back to The Beat Within, Project WHAT!!!

Project WHAT!

Did you know?

• Over 7 million children have a parent under the supervision of the criminal justice system, which means they have a parent who is in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole. That's one in ten of the nation's children.
• We estimate that more than 88,000 youth under age 25 in San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa counties have a parent under the supervision of the criminal justice system.
• Incarceration disproportionately impacts people of color and poor people. More than 60 percent of the people in prison are racial and ethnic minorities.

The story that follows is the first in a series from Bay Area youth sharing firsthand what it's like to have a parent in prison or jail. These young authors, all of whom participate in a program called Project WHAT!—We're Here and Talking, will be featured in upcoming issues of The Beat Within. The common thread tying together these authors' stories is that each of them has had a parent incarcerated. Not all of the youth focus directly on their parent's incarceration, but they write about their own struggles, successes, dreams, and goals. This month's story is by Demel Bullock. We hope the stories inspire you and give you insight into these young people's lives.

I am proud to be the Program Director of Project WHAT! As Program Director, I have the opportunity to work closely with the talented and courageous group of teenagers and young adults who make up our team. Project WHAT! creates opportunities for the team to empower themselves and educate others by speaking out about parental incarceration.

Project WHAT!:
Provides participants with the opportunity for meaningful, paid work experience;
Helps participants develop skills in areas such as teamwork, writing, research, public speaking, facilitation, and fundraising; and
Supports participants in achieving their life goals and ambitions.

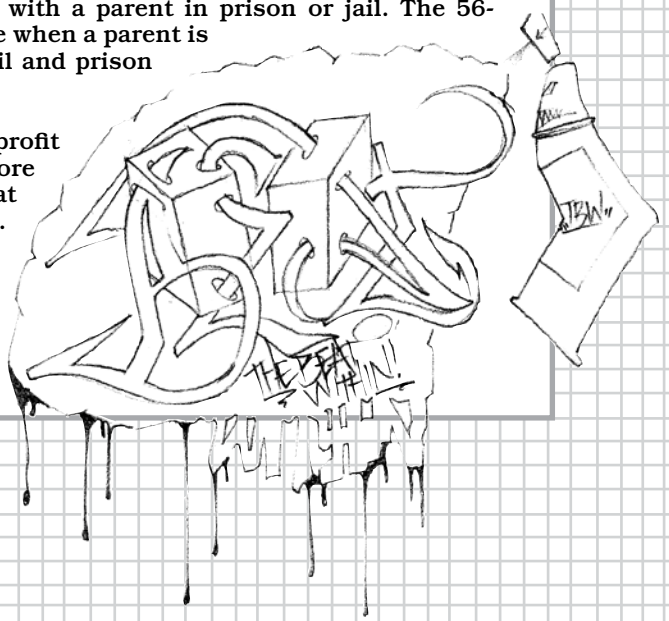
In only one year, the Project WHAT! team has:
Reached more than 350 service providers and youth by doing presentations and trainings in the Bay Area and beyond;

Traveled to Seattle in the fall of 2006 to present at a conference (and has been accepted to present at a conference in Atlanta in the fall of 2007);

Created a resource guide for teens in the Bay Area with a parent in prison or jail. The 56-page guide answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated and has a section that explains complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language.

Project WHAT! is a program of Community Works, a nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California. For more information, and to access the resource guide, call us at (510) 486-2340 or go online to: www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html. If you're a young person who has a parent incarcerated and want a copy of our resource guide, we'll mail you a free copy. We hope you enjoy these stories.

-Anna Wong,
Program and Policy Director Project WHAT!



Knowledge became my friend. Knowledge kicked in when my friends asked for help on homework. Knowledge made me accept myself.

Heartless

A lot of people call me heartless, so I'm 'bout to give you the background of how I became that way.

Man, I can't remember a time when we weren't poor. Don't get me wrong, we were filthy rich in love and loyalty, but in dollars our wealth didn't amount to much. I lived with my mama, well my great grandmother actually, but I call her mama. My real mother is always in and out of jail and never around, and even when she is I wish she wasn't. I have no feelings toward her. My mama tells me I'm wrong for that, that I should love her since she's my "mom," but she's not, my grandma is my mother, the one who stood by me in all my struggles, made me feel as though I was somebody, and provided the real parental love "that other woman" didn't. Therefore, that other woman is lower to me than an enemy.

Not having parents around, the people who look like you, affects the way you look at yourself. I would not come to terms with my appearance until late in life, if I even have now. But some things I learned along the way helped me a great deal with the missing pieces.

Another struggle: we've lived everywhere. In little apartments, abandoned houses, with family members, in our car—I mean everywhere. But fast forward that, leaves change colors, I'm on the block, you already know which one, no daddy around, so it's time for me to find that male figure, someone to fill that void. Instead, I find nothing but trouble. Too much time on my hands and growing up too fast, Mama sick and we need money, that's all I knew. Not surviving was not an option so I became one of those statistic kids they warn you about. No, not on a corner or in a bed, but hustling all the same. Knew I was tired of seeing my mama cry herself to sleep every night, tired of doing something like crying myself, but bitterness and loneliness had dried up my tears a long time ago. Maybe I did cry then. I can't remember now, that was too many lifetimes ago. My soul has gone through too many transformations since then.

My saving grace from getting caught up in all the drama that had engulfed my life, from becoming a copy of all the mistakes my mother made, was my knowledge. Knowledge. The most powerful word I know. My ticket out, my way out. My thinking brain is my way to escape from everybody and everything.

The moment I found out I was smart, 8th grade, I think, when they were telling us that everybody in the class, except for me, was in great jeopardy of not graduating. That jumpstarted my self-appreciation. Or, maybe it was the fact that I knew, I better have good grades or else my mama would have my butt. I like to think it was all me, and when I look back I know that it was own determination that got me through. Knowledge let me know that I was somebody, a reckoning force that sooner or later somebody was going to have to deal with.

All before then I was reading, reading, reading, anything I could get my hands on. I have read hundreds of books, some I can't even remember, just my brain steadily absorbing everything it could, until I finally took a breath. I realized I could pick up a book and what was in it might help me get out of the predicament of either going crazy or not making it that, up until then, I thought were the only options.

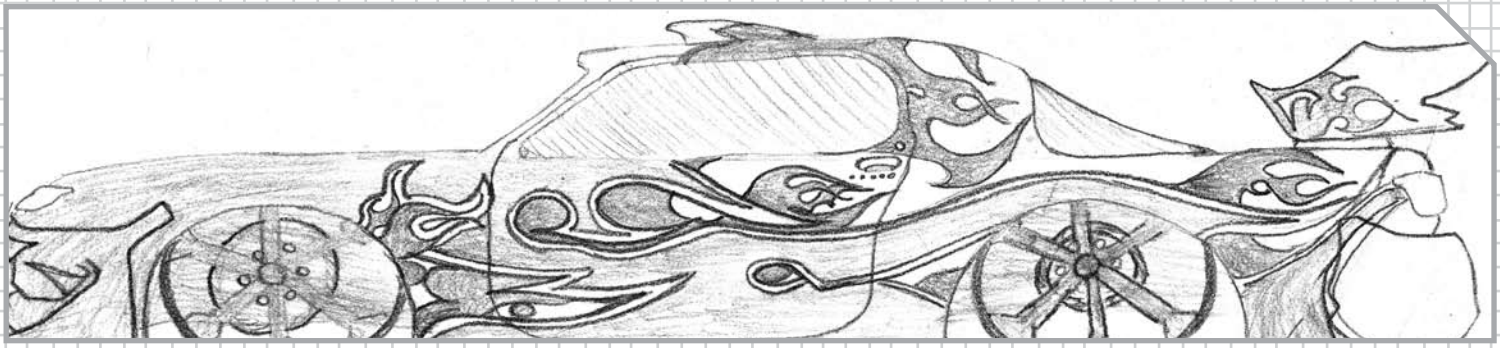
Knowledge became my friend. Knowledge kicked in when my friends asked for help on homework. Knowledge made me accept myself. Knowledge made me focus. Knowledge taught me that it was okay that nobody around me looked like I did because that just made it harder for anybody to clone my greatness. Knowing that people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities can do anything enforced my driving will to succeed because now my features or my thought of being ugly didn't matter. Shoot, look at Oprah. And the fact that I didn't have real parents, lived with a sick grandmother, and knew too much for my time--I learned that was all part of a greater good. I realized that if I could just harness all that anger, frustration, and knowledge into something good, there's no telling what might happen

It took awhile, but my thoughts started to shift. Learning about all the mistakes made since the beginning of time taught me that everybody makes mistakes, and while I don't forgive my mother for the hell and strife that I had to live through because of her, I am more aware of the many people who do the same things she does every day. I learned that sometimes you just have to say, "All right, we don't like that it's happening, but how can we prevent it from happening again—and then do everything you can to prevent it.

I knew that I hated the person that my mother had turned out to be, but my main focus was making sure I did not end up like her. My goals and dreams had nothing to do with that aspect of life.

Now don't get me wrong, this is not a pretty story with a happy ending. Just a twig on one of the mighty branches of my life. So after we spruce this redwood up a bit, I'll let you know how far down I think the roots will go.

-Tiffany, Project WHAT!



My Tree

If planted, I think my tree's roots would be negative because of the negative things I been around and seen when I was a child then that made me think negative because I seen other people doing it. So I thought it was cool, even though I heard my mom tell me not to do stuff and she said what was bad and what was good.

As my tree grow I see myself from bad to good, but it changes back and forth. As I get older, I experience different things. I figure as my tree grow, I grow, and I get more negative. That's when I started experiencing different types of drugs, so I see my tree gets more negative.

From where I am now, and where I plan to be in the future, I see my life is not on the right track to what I want to be in the future. My grades is not right and I'm not in the right place to be playing football. That's why I can't wait to get out. To show the world what I'm about.

-Melvin, Alameda

From The Beat: You really embraced the tree metaphor and wrote about your life as you change and grow just like the tree. You are still growing and changing. The future is yours to write. And remember your roots may be negative, but there are also strength and positive roots there too, thanks to your mom.

Deadly Television

I turn on the TV and I said, "man there is always somebody being killed, whether by the police or the devil's favorite, black on black crime." Most people in Oakland show this negative surrounding like they have a barrier on their forehead that says, "back up I'm dangerous!"

What you don't see on the television is the white rich beating up on bums just to get a kick out of it. But if I tuned on the TV and saw that I white women got beat up and robbed by a group of minors from Oakland, then the whole America would be upset. So, why is that? Do I have to bathe in bleach just to be treated as one, or better yet a human being instead of a servant?

When I turn off the TV and open my door it seems to me that the TV is still on and once again I join the devil's game by making a bad choice.

I look down the street, there's Channel 6 News asking people questions... "What? Where? How? But then?" The police coming to every body's door and asking, "what? Who? How? Are you sure?"

Yet you don't want any problems ,so you just do the first thing that comes to mind which is to say, "I don't know anything," and close the door to the TV.

Is this so? That there are hundreds of people outside, but nobody seen anything? Is everybody scared of that person they call the Boss Man to the underworld? Why? Why should we be scared of him if all you need to do is wake up and smell the buttermilk coffee and two sugars? Is this the reality I want to live in, where you always have to have hollow tips at the waist buckle for protection 'cause you never know when something might turn left.

Wake-up, wake-up, wake-up!! Why do I keep hearing that wake up?

The reality is that when I open my door I got shot four times and woke up in a hospital but thought I heard the devil call my name.

-Lil' Twenty-one, Alameda

From The Beat: The violence is so out of control, people are afraid to take a stand, make a change, so they close the door to the violence, they look the other way when questioned, is this the way one should live? Of course not. You take big steps with this honest commentary. We are grateful you are alive to tell. We hope this is only the beginning of your crusade to save your generation and the future from this destructive lifestyle that's plaguing the community.

The Soil Where I Plant My Seed

My tree will look like Polynesian faces, Hispanic faces,
African
American faces, and Asian faces.
Because the soil where I plant my seed is located at
diverse places
I want to think of my tree as a sign of success
But the community we live in just gives us a sign of
distress
I think to myself when will fairness in our community
commence
The law still letting us kill each other
They ain't even making an effort to stop it or slow it
down to a suspense
It's so many cats trying to change but they can't in a
corrupt environment
The truth that I'm spitting is for the youngstas
I'm hoping it's gonna inspire them
I'm just trying to change
And have something positive
That I can manage with
So when I plant this successful tree
I hope my little ones rely on it.

-Kaho, Alameda

From The Beat: That tree is a dream we believe you'll achieve, but you gotta water it, from the trunk to the leaves, and you got to keep the poisons away, the ones from the streets, and also the ones you bring in with your own two feets. Here you make a promise, to your future your seed, you plant the tree, now it's on you to feed.

Old Me, And The New You

I realize that we can't start over, old me, and the new you. I can never leave you. This is the body God chose for you. You will just manifest into what will be a more advanced you. Looking back at how I used to be and now if I had a time machine to send me a letter, it would go something like this . . .

If you knew what you know now, you wouldn't have made the mistake/s that landed you everywhere else you never imagined to be. But you are also lucky that all of that will shape you into that better me.

Thank you. You taught me to expect the unexpected. And also thanks to you, I'm me. I'm in a position where I can absolutely change for the better. I love you.

To whom I might become in any given time. Hello. Whatever has happened you are a gift to earth, given power to love everybody unconditionally. Don't ruin your blessing. Don't let anyone take it from you. You may be on BET singing with stars, you are just as talented. Or you may be reaching out to people who need the gift you were given to share. Or you may have got back with your ex-boyfriend. Tried to kill him, or even did. You know you've always had a crazy side of you! No matter what you will never stop loving.

If I die before I get to see how you turned out, I love me, no matter what. And will push through life until the day I die. Cherishing every moment back then, now, and later.

-Jackson Alameda

From The Beat: This is a very interesting letter. There can be so much strength and motivation gained from this letter? Everything you've mentioned and touched on, are some fine points that you too must keep in mind. Keep in mind what you're capable of and not placing yourself in a position to go backwards. As you "cherish every moment," know that they all go hand in hand and work together in unison, if you allow them to do so. May you be fortunate enough to live and take part in the life you're working to establish.

Life of Pain

No one sees my struggle, no one sees my pain, and my life is really not a game. The life I lived and the stuff I seen it was like a dream Getting kicked out of my house when I was a very young teen, seen your grandfather murder your mother when I was eight years old, seven shots to her back and I knew she was gone. Last word she said she will always be in my heart. One shot to his dead, and he's dead. And all they said is that they'll love us to the end.

It's not easy livin' my life, getting kicked out when I was very young, it was not easy, it was hard sleepin' in cars, with nothin' to eat or drink, until my friend took me in for a month and until my brother came and took me with him.

But it was all 'cause my mom needed the room for my little brother, but my step dad gave me 200 dollars and I started sellin' drugs to get more money to buy what I needed. So I really think all you young people need to stay close to your family as you can, and to stay away from drugs and from Juvenile Hall. All this is comin' from the heart, and if I could go back and change everything I would, but I can't, so RIP to my loved ones.

-Jesus, Alameda

From The Beat: Wow, Jesus, you have been tested with some hard trials, having to fend for yourself at such an early age, and we admire you for being able to put it all down and keep that love in your heart. What will you do next? Is your brother going to have custody of yours? This first chapter of your life is tragic, but you survived it, and we are hoping to read a happier chapter soon! You deserve a good life, full of love and happiness.

. . . please Mom, come back in to my life,
And together our drug addiction we could fight

Mom Came Back

I don't remember my mom being around when I was a child,
still to this day my memory of her is mild.
All I remember of her is seeing her back,
but when I was little I never knew she was addicted to crack.
She would always take us places and say: "Stay here, I'm going to the store."
But after a couple of days, I would stop looking at the door.
She would be gone days, sometimes weeks.
I never knew she was on dope missions running the streets.
I had to grow up fast and learn how to take care of the house.
So, I was on the block chasing money like a cat chases a mouse.
I was moving farther and farther down the wrong road,
and I did not care about anyone – my heart was so cold.
I started to blame it on my mom cause she was always gone,
so I told myself I'd never be like my mom.
But day after day, I started in her ways,
always on drugs my life in a haze.
I'm changing now because I can't live my life like this.
But you're still my mom,
I just wish you would help and give me a hug and a kiss.
So please Mom, come back in to my life,
And together our drug addiction we could fight.
So please don't leave again, I'm tired of crying for my mother,
And even though you were never there – I wouldn't ask for no other.

-Skull Head, Santa Clara

From the Beat: Not only is this an incredibly well-written poem – the rhyme really gives it a powerful rhythm, but it is really touching. The fact that you take responsibility for your problems and don't just blame them all on your mother makes it seem like you are ready to heal your relationship with her – or at least forgive her for what she did.

When I first got locked up, I realized how much I should've cherished all the moments I've had with my family.

Not Enough Time To Be Home

I'm sure there are many ups and downs in everyone's lives. When you're locked up, do you ever look back at the times when you always spent your spare time at home? I can't believe it was just two years ago that I was always at home with my family.

When I first got locked up, I realized how much I should've cherished all the moments I've had with my family. I remember when I used to get so annoyed at my parents and yell at them. Thinking back to my younger years, I should have appreciated them more because they are the ones that are there for me now. Not friends.

When you're out there having all that fun, all you think about is enjoying time spent with friends doing things we're not supposed to be doing. When it became too late and I was in custody, it came to me that my friends aren't there for me when I need them the most. The ones that came to visit me and show up at all my court dates aren't my friends, but are my family members.

-Carmax, San Francisco

From The Beat: There is a lot of wisdom in this piece. Basically, what you're saying is that when you were at home, you were living, thinking and acting like a child, and all children think they know more than their parents. But now, as a young adult, you're able to weigh your own experiences and adjust your attitudes and way of acting in accordance with this new knowledge. That's called being a responsible adult. Good for you!

Back To Vegas

It's July 22, and I'm getting released today. It is my 18th birthday, and I'm getting ready to head back to Vegas. I've been here for 62 days, and I'm ready to go back. Oakland was cool and all, but it isn't like Vegas. I miss my family and friends, and being in the state of Nevada. Never again will I get locked up out of state. Since I was so far from home, I couldn't make long distance calls or get visits, so it was pretty rough. But it's all good because I'm done serving my time. I just have to keep my promises I made to myself. I promised myself and God that I'd start to live a godly life and start going to church. I promised myself I'd finish my education. I promised myself I'd get a job and make money the legal way. I promised myself I wouldn't enter the adult system because once you enter the adult system there is no more slaps on the wrist, to the Big House you go> I promised myself a legit life and today that life starts.

Also, I'd like to give a shout out to Vegas and all the kids locked up in the Vegas Juvenile Hall on Bonanza and Pecos. And I'd like to thank The Beat for going to Vegas! Keep your heads up!

-Tyler, Alameda

From The Beat: It's good to have your piece in here along with the pieces of all the young writers from Vegas. Take care of yourself and stay in touch!

Our Struggles

I look at you and wonder:
Aren't you supposed to be my mother?
Aren't you supposed to be my friend?
But you left me hanging and
being here without you makes it feel like it's the end.
I look at you and see someone strong and full of power,
but then I take a second look
and see you struggle to survive.
I'm gonna always love you, because of you I'm alive.
I know you made mistakes.
I've also made a few.
One day we'll be reunited
like we always wanted to.
But until then,
we both got to do what we gotta do,
to get out.
Hope you change, Momma!

Much love and respect to all in here. Keep your head up, stay strong, smile always.

-Lil' One, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is such a powerful poem recognizing the dual struggle that you and your mother have to get healthy. Maybe you can be an example for your mother by changing first.

My Life Is One Of The Hardest

If we change places, I would learn the harder part of your life, like problems in your life. But if you were in my shoes, you would see that my life is one of the hardest.

Most of the people in my life that have died, have died in my arms. And now I have a kid that I only seen once for a couple of days. Then I got locked up 'cause of my wife. Every time she gets mad 'cause I won't tell her where I was, 'cause I was doing something bad. She would flip out and tell my PO. Now I'm locked up again.

Mom is having another kid. My brothers are getting into trouble and beat on 'cause of what I have done in the past. Try living in these shoes, where everything dies, or gets hurt, it's all your fault and you can't do anything about it. Try that for a change. And I have money, cars, house, wife, kids, bills to pay, plus a lot of problems in my life. So, late.

-Lil' Dreamer, Santa Clara

From The Beat: That definitely sounds like a very hard life to live. Now that you know exactly what you're working with, what are some of the solutions that you have come up with? We can sit here and compare lives, or we can come up with solutions to change the chaos that our lives are surrounded with. From what you've shared, you definitely have a lot to lose materialistically. But more importantly is the bond with your child, who is totally innocent and will look to you for guidance. What can you do to better your life, that really means bettering the life of your child? Is it worth it to you? We certainly hope so but actions speak louder than words!

Changing Places With My Mom

If I could change places with somebody it would have to be my mom. Funny that I choose my moms, ha? I would choose her because she always asking me what's going on with me and I have no answer. I would want her to learn about me and feel what's going on. She would most definitely would learn my struggle, worries, and how easy it is to get peer pressured in these streets.

But on the flip side, if I were in her shoes I would have to learn how she feels to stress about me not coming home, running up to juvenile every time I'm in trouble. If we did that switch I think our understanding would be a lot better.

-Stoffice, San Francisco

From The Beat: You've put your finger on it, Stoffice. You are so right that trading places would not only give your mom an understanding of your struggles, but it would give you an understanding of the fear and pain your mom feels every time you are out of her sight. If you were able to trade for a minute, do you think it would change the way you (or she) live your lives?

The TV I Watch

The TV I watch is not plugged into the wall,
On the TV I watch I see the rise and fall.
The TV I watch sees no color in faces,
The TV I watch is of hateful people destroying sacred places.
The TV I watch has no off switch,
The TV I watch shows how the world in a ditch.
The TV I watch focuses on hatred and poverty,
Murders and robbing is all the camera sees.
The TV that is always on, it never stops,
The TV that is on cannot be bought,
The TV of true life is the TV I watch!

-Giovanni, Santa Clara

From The Beat: What a sad commentary on the activities that go on outside your doors. Is there anything you can do to change the picture — if not the entire picture, then just your part of it? Can you conjure memories of joy? Where was that live-action TV camera when you were experiencing those moments?

Thoughts Of A Changed Man

For the love of this life
Fallen soldiers that earn stripes
Zebras with no stripes
Zombies with no life
The struggle is worth it
If you value ya right
I love this land
But it's dangerous
At the same time
And they say
You can't be charged twice
With the same crime
But how come
They give whites
Less time
For the same crime?
I think even psychos
Got a sane mind
And all hear in my head
Is that same rhyme
The same rhythm
With the same chime?
Little kids scream my name
At the same time
But, yet I walk the path
That I don't see
'Cause I am blind
I remember playing tag with whales
In my jeans when I was nine
Now I am all grown up
And all I got is money
On my mind
I know some people a do anything for it
'Cause that's what helps a shine
But evil lurks and creeps
Into a dangerous mind
I know ninjas who' tired of living
In these dangerous times
But Simon says
"Put yo' hands up
And never give up"
Even if I had no legs
And was in a wheelchair
I still wouldn't give up
Every day I swallow my Lucky Charms
'Cause I need them with me
Then grab my thoughts
'Cause they weren't born with me
So, when I leave this earth
Ma soul won't be empty
Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: You write so evocatively about everyone who loves life has to fight for it fiercely, Dark Side, and how no one can give up. And even though you write that the judicial system favors the light skinned, which can cause your life to be all the more endangered, you haven't lost heart. You sound like you get your strength to keep up the fight from your prodigious mind. Your poems and wisdom truly inspire us, your readers!

Innocent Blood, Part 2

The after life of that street soldier
His son was born and getting older
Never knew who his daddy was
Growing up to be a ruthless thug
Stealing, killing whatever he can
Doing stupid things he thought he was the man
Raised himself cause mama wasn't there
Scared of death but always prepared
His daddy died innocent but didn't stop to think
Writing his heart out using blood for ink
Writing pops a letter he will never get
For the father that died and he never met
Wishing that he didn't live his life
And that his daddy would have thought twice
Now he has a kid of his own
Don't know what to do because it was never shown
Can't call for help so it's back to the streets
Making money so his daughter can eat
Stealing, killing is back in his life
Only if he would have stopped to think twice
Now he is wanted by other niggas
When they see him they'll pull the trigger
Why did that drive-by have to happen
Now he'll end up like his daddy

-Lil' Mainy The Prince, Alameda

From The Beat: Your poem is masterful but you forgot one thing, he's still got a chance if he's still breathing. He and his Daddy might seem the same, but if he moves away with his kid he can break that chain. If only life was just that simple, you've got skills Lil' Mainy keep using that pencil.

The Imprisoned Angel

Am I a dark angel,
Lost in a bright world,
I will fly if I try,
But the bracelets won't let 'em curl.
Am I an angel unknown to God,
Waiting for a life sentence,
Too many life rules that apply,
Or is this an imagination
Am I an angel with loose strings,
No storyline to finish my dream,
It feel better than sexual tension,
Just like the drugs that's in my system.
Am I an angel that's still alive,
In a coffin getting ready to die,
Probably destroyed by the media world,
Or locked up behind a girl.
I'm an angel with a malignant mind,
Smart but still doing time,
Doesn't matter how many girls I got,
Or how much money I drop,
I still feel like I'm in a shell,
Unable to make self decisions,
So I think about it,
I'm an angel locked up in prison.

-Justin, Alameda

From The Beat: Another terrific poem, young Justin... and yes, the angel in you is locked up – but isn't that partly on account of the devil in you too? We all have good and bad inside us, it's the side we act on that makes us who we are. So which side of you do you act on?

How Much The Beat Within Has Changed My Life

My name is Vincent and I just want to tell how much The Beat Within changed me. I like going to The Beat Workshops, because it's where I can go one time out of the week to write on topics that are similar to my life. Ever since I've been coming to The Beat I look at life in a way different form and it changed me so much that I don't even think the way I use to think. When I leave from the class I feel so happy it's like I have no problems in my life and I like how it changed me, because it's like all day long I am so, so happy. Thank you for reading what I send you. Bye.

-Vincent, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: This is such an honor for us to read your beautiful and touching commentary. It is you who makes The Beat special. You take our topics and your writing serious and that equals you taking more responsibility in your life. We hope you keep us posted wherever you go from here. We are glad to have played a part in your young life. Keep reading, writing and teaching!

When I leave from the class I feel so happy it's like I have no problems in my life...

A Hell Experience

If I were you and you were me, you would go through hell and experience a tough life. You would stare at a wet picture of your family. Not wet because of spilt water, but wet because of soaked tears. Thinking it's time to leave for good because of multiple problems, but instead, staring through a glass window with a locked door and a toilet with a bed in the same room. Addicted to cigarettes and white-man drugs. Face the nightmare that comes back to haunt you of a strange day waking up getting told that your brother died in a gang fight last night from the police.

If I were you and you were me. I don't know your life, in that case, I'll experience a new world. Hoping it's good.

-Phi

From The Beat: Brutal piece of work. What can you do to change your reality? The time is now not to give up but to learn how to find freedom, embrace it, and use it in your everyday life, it can be done from the inside as well as the outside. You have plenty to share! Write on!

Dramatic Youngsta

The challenges of life are special private stress
A dramatic documentary of a young man depress
No motivation so all I do is stupid crimes
Established a mind system that's so strongly blind
Defense of any danger that's against my achieve
Dramatic character is what I have believe
Comfortable with the balance I had required
Aggressive against my own desire.
Condition of a loser just determined to lose
Doing stupid intelligence to be cool
Now fortunately I'm reconstructin' my position
'Cause my unfolded evidence put me on a mission
Capable of any potential but I choose to die
Solution of this a dramatic youngsta with no cries
Original youngsta that's legendary to my will
Fashionable convinced to be a dramatic drill
Involved in every crime for the love and respect
Now I'm living as evidence of a suspect
Trapped inside a dangerous mind
A dramatic youngster that's going against crime.

-Lil' Papa, ALameda

From The Beat: You deliver yet another deep insightful piece of yourself. It is an honor to watch you create and share these autobiographical poems with The Beat.

American Dream, Part 1

For many this is the summation of the American dream that piece of the pie that young men and women everywhere aspire to obtain.

We are raised with the ethic that if you work hard you will succeed. If you go to school and get an education, you'll get a good job, a beautiful wife, and a picket fence surrounding nice green grass to water on Sundays, but what happens when your school is a war zone, nothing more than a fashion show, and the only education you get is from a teacher who doesn't see you as a person but as a problem and therefore treats you as such? What happens when your job pays a slave's wages but the cost of living is a king's ransom?

And even if you do have a degree, a piece of paper confirming you've been educated just the fact of being young and black is considered a liability instead of an asset.

Under these circumstances the only fence a young black man sees is the one around the project complex or the prison he's in so by the time you see that nice green grass it's in the manicured lawn of the cemetery your final resting place.

The American dream has been deferred so those who realize this have chosen another avenue to success another road to riches a darker but parallel path.

This is the way of the gangster, the ones who makes his own list of rules and enforces it. His word is his gun and his silence is law. Violations are dealt with swiftly and by the code of the streets justly. This is the world where loyalty and honor really mean something because anything less can cost you your life.

-Jesus Coleone, Alameda

From The Beat: What an amazing piece of poetry! This is a classic piece of work that we hope will touch many readers and inspire others to step up their game as well. You have truly taken your writing to the next level. Keep teaching!

American Dream, Part 2

I'm supposed to be living the American dream but really I'm just part of the American reality.

I know that this country was built on the same principles that I ruthlessly enforce.

I know the pilgrims were pillagers who conned the natives out of their country and then the natives got wise those pilgrims raped, burned, and slaughtered all who stood in their path.

But it doesn't stop with what the English took from the native.

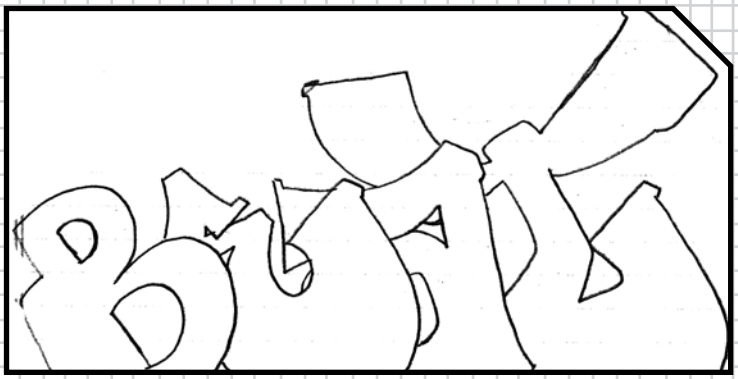
The Americans took from the English with common thug tactics and a "ef you" attitude. When Patrick Henry said, "give me liberty or give me death" he might as well have screamed "ride or die!" or "get down or lay down" because that's what he meant. The Americans ran England off their block and we celebrate it every fourth of July.

So what is so wrong with me doing the same thing? We see this, understand it, and it applies to the world in which we dwell in but instead of invading countries we invade hoods spreading the same violence poison and corruption on a smaller scale we destroy lives, create illusions, and sell dreams.

All the while profiting until one day the very law we created backlashes and destroys us and the cycle continues on and on but when will this stop? And how far are you willing to go?

-Jesus Coleone, Alameda

From The Beat: You deliver an incredible piece of work here! It is an honor to showcase your raw talents in The Beat Within. You have come such a long way as a teacher and writer. Thank you for shedding light with this hard hitting in your face commentary!



My Tree will look like

If my tree was planted the minute I was born into this world, it starts it's experience, its joyful time, it's sad time its whole life for the 17 years that it lived and would still grow for many years.

My tree would show many changes during it's years of growth because my tree has tasted different cultures and lifestyles for years and moved on to a new one.

My tree would show all it cuts, for all the physical pain it took in it's ten through fifteen years, it would show the joyful time from it's first year to it's seventh. Then show how lonely it was between the years seven and nine, and it's most painful and sad times from years fourteen to seventeen.

My tree has shown even more emotional times but it also showed its happy and strong times.

My tree would be old and wise with knowledge and experience at only seventeen years of age and still has a long way to go. To learn more to experience more and to go through more emotional times both good and bad.

What my tree would look like is still unknown until the life from it is cut off and finally dead. But for now it looks good and healthy, a bit tainted but healthy none the less.

-John, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It sounds to us like your tree has had its rough times through the years but is now being cared for by someone who knows what he's doing. Do you think that one day your tree will be able to fully recover from the negative things that have left it a bit tainted? What will it take to get your tree back to full health?

Where My Seeds Lay

I've planted my seed in the earth
Watching over my tree from its beginning, its birth.
I've planted a seed expecting it to grow,
Hoping that its progress will be fast, but instead it's very slow.
I've planted my seed with loving hands,
Hoping that it won't be destroyed by the hateful man.
I've planted my seeds in the perfect spot,
Where it rains at times, but is also hot.
I've planted my seeds in a place that is plain as day,
So when people look at me they can see where my seeds lay!

-Giovanni, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Even though you hoped your seedling would grow fast, we're happy that it is taking time — time to absorb the nutrients from the earth, to take moisture from the environment, to send roots down deep to make them sturdy and strong. We're glad there will be time for your tree to sprout branches for shade and to give life to other living things. We're glad because we can see the powerful oak that your efforts are producing right before our eyes!

Tending To My Young Tree

Q-vole Beat? It's that one and only Chucky from that city of San Jo where the Sharks roam. Well, today's subject is about how would my tree look like. Well ,first I would have to find the perfect, most beautiful woman. Make sure she is the right one. (I think I already found her.) In this subject I'm going to try to identify my kid in the place of the tree. Well if I ever have one.

So let's see, automatically first I will have to plant the seed of Chuck, wait nine months... My little plant would shine and blossom as bright and wide as it could. Its first developed branch would be its stem. It would be hella wide and that branch is called strength. The wider and taller it gets, that's how much strength it would have.

The next branch would grow long and strong. And that one is the education. But I want it more longer so it grows two of those exact branches. Of those two branches, millions of leaves would grow. That would be the sign of courage. Then it would grow five stronger, but short branches showing that my kid would never be no punk. Those branches should be able to intimidate any other growing tree around. As life goes on, those branches get longer and stronger day by day...

-Chucky, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We admire the things you want for your seed to grow strong and educated. At the same time, can you really create a strong tree if you, yourself, have not tended to your own branches and roots? The most important thing any child needs to grow strong is a strong role model. You must be the tree you want him to become!

Seeds

I can't say: Oh, yeah – my life is about smashing all day since I was a youngster. I can't say: I planted seeds of posting, selling rocks, or whatever. I also can't say I have been planting a seed of education, because I never cared much for school.

My tree is not going to be a tree at all, but more like a garden. I've got seeds of putting in work. I've got seeds of slanging. I've got seeds of hitting licks. Most of the seeds I've got are all bad, but my garden will not come out bad. Why? Because I am going to dig up those foul seeds of despair and hurt, and I'll replace them with seeds of hope, seeds of education and closeness with family – family I never see due to these negative blossoms.

-L, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Here's a good word: apophasis. It means to mention something by saying that you won't mention it. As you have done in your piece. We want you and everyone else to know that there's almost no subject you can't talk about in The Beat, as long as you talk about it with respect and with the intention of educating those of us who read The Beat. We're glad about your new gardening plans. We wish you a bumper harvest. Keep us posted. Send us a flower.

My City, My Country

My city is a real small city called the Jungle
My country is called the USA
In my city you can get yo' life took if you a outter towner
On my block, making too much money
In my country, if you Black and you murder a white person
You can get 25 with a L
And if you White and you murder somebody Black
You might just get let go
In my city, we all treat each other like family
We all stick together, like birds flying north
In my country, we all dyin' from bull
Like oil, money, girls and he say/she say
In my city, it's a homicide every ten years
In my country, it's a homicide every ten seconds
In my city, the police harass you 24 if you Black
In my country, most Blacks are doing life
Just for protecting themselves from harassment from the police
In my city, if the sun is shining too hard
At least three to fo' fights can happen
In my country, if it gets too cold
And somebody ain't got what you got
They go' get in that cold spirit
And strip yo' ass
In my city, my young ninjas trying to make it to the top
Getting fast money
In my country, some people make it to the top
Getting fast money
Some make it to the top
Getting legal money
But, remember, fast money ain't always good money,
It can get you locked up for half yo' life
Or life
But, peace out, Beat
I'm out
Getting out pretty soon
And all the game I learned from The Beat writers
I'm running with it
For the people reading this
If you can't do the time
Don't do the crime
And snitches end up six feet
Stay solid and safe
For people doing dummy time
Keep ya heads up fast!

-Turf Dancing-O, Marin

From The Beat: You've brilliantly described your city, your country, Turf Dancing-O. Even though, unfortunately, what you write about your city is also true of other areas of the Bay Area. You're right that the justice system is way unbalanced—that if someone's murder victim is white, that s/he can receive a way more serious sentence than if the victim is someone of color. That totally isn't fair, and there can be several lessons to be learned from this. One is don't hurt anybody, ever, right?

Wondering

If I could trade places with someone it would be a baby because then there wouldn't be a worry in da world only when my next bottle will be made or when are they gonna get this poop off me.

I wouldn't worry about court, probation, or none of the bad things that are going on in my life right now. I would even trade places with an animal at this point in time because life is getting harder every year.

Sometimes I'd rather be an adult to see how it feels to pay bills, a car note even taking care of my own child to see what ma mom and other moms and dads feel about raising a child, bein' successful at a career I love doing and feel proud doin it.

If you were me -- you would toss and turn in your sleep wondering.

-Donald, Alameda

From the Beat: Great piece. Hopefully you will have a chance to find out about what these things feel like – because there are some incredible things about adulthood that no one should have to miss: Earning a paycheck, taking a roadtrip across country, holding your baby in your arms for the first time and then watching him or her grow up...It's worth looking forward to, and striving for.

If you were me -- you would toss and turn in your sleep wondering.

This American Dream

The ideal American dream for me is to stop the black on black violence, have more African Americans with an education and less incarceration. Not just African Americans, it's for Latinos and others, because we are the minority of the people living in poverty.

It's hard for us because most of us slang drugs, aggressively persuade into solicitation of a females being, even stea,l and it's all to make a quick dollar in society.

We say forget Uncle Sam and take a left turn instead of the right way to succeed in life. It's hard for us Americans that live in poverty to make legal money because of racism that's still going on today in life. That's why we take the easy way out and use drugs as the only way out.

It's a lot of drug addicts in the streets because of the educations us people didn't achieve when we had the chance. But the finer things in life distracted us people, such as street money, jewelry, nice cars and the number one top rated drug in the world, cocaine.

There's other drugs people are addicted to like ecstasy, heroin, etc. But cocaine was one of the first drugs sold. It has killed over millions of people and still killing. It's the rich man's drug you either make good money off of it, or ruin your life using it. Well it's all going to end you up somewhere you don't want to be. Jail or dead. That's why it needs to be a change for us.

We all deserve second chances, instead of being labeled. How are we going to get good jobs if we are labeled as drug dealers, gangsters, prostitutes, or bums? It's not too late for a change. Rap videos hip cloths and all that good stuff, but really it's nothing but politics most people do what they see and it sets a trend. We could live a better life if we had more dreams and goals.

As for me I've got the best of both worlds the street life and having my nose in the books because I have the American Dream. The dream to make it out of the neighborhood and be successful in life instead of another black man down the gutter. The white man stops us from certain things but for the most part we put it on ourselves to make the wrong decision. Actions speak louder than words. And I'm going to take action.

If you want to be stuck keep heading down the wrong path it's not going to end you up anywhere. If you're locked up gain knowledge because like I said we have a second chance. The world has many things to offer. An education is the key to success. All it takes is a little bit of inspiration everybody has a talent but some people are insecure to reveal those talents and it doesn't matter what people think about you. Believe to achieve, fall, get back up, brush yourself off. It's not the end of the world, life move on, and when you do good deeds, good things happen. All it is, is opportunities. Faith is what you need to have.

-Traveon, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You must have faith! Continue to believe. Remember you can't live on both sides of the fence, eventually something will give. We really enjoyed this inspiring piece of writing as much as we enjoyed hearing you read aloud to the group. Continue thinking this through and in the end we hope you have a game plan that will work.

My Tree Would Look Like

What would my tree look like? The seed that I have planted throughout my life would grow a tree with a lot of missing branches. The roots to my tree would be stronger than anything known to man because I feel like I've been through a lot in my life, but since I'm still living it only made me stronger. The missing branches would be the time I spent without my family because of the bad mistakes I've made. But no matter how bad my tree may look to you now with a little more water and love it will grow to be a beautiful man.

-Lil' Chris, Alameda

From The Beat: What a wonderful outlook on yourself as you look at your past and for see a brighter future. What will it take?

The Garden of the Mind

Inside of us are planted many seeds. Seeds of anger, love, hate, humor, good and bad. Truly, the mind is a garden. How can we continue to water the wrong seeds! The "seeds" exist in our subconscious mind the "water" is the attention we pay to these emotions. But we are not the only ones who water our seeds. We can be influenced by everything around us; the music we listen to, the TV programs we watch, the way others around us act, these all contribute to what make us who we are. So, we must be very careful what we are exposed to, when we have that option. Sadly we often don't, so, I guess this is the part where I turn it around, huh? There must be balance; if everything around you is negative you'd better pay a lot of attention to the positive. With luck, those around you will follow your example.

The only way to change something else is to change yourself. Uproot your bad seeds, you don't need them; they will only make you waver under pressure. Take roots in your beliefs so they can stand up under the storm of adversity, otherwise we will fall in hypocrisy. Never allow yourself to be so weak.

-Monk, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Excellent piece of on-topic writing. You not only take on the topic, but you step up big time and teach us readers. Write on!

The only way to change something else is to change yourself. Uproot your bad seeds, you don't need them; they will only make you waver under pressure.

American Dream

To me the American dream is to have peace and to see my people strive and succeed instead of being the downfall in society.

Today brown on brown and black on black crime is nothing new. This battles between our races has been going on for years and for decades, it has destroyed our communities.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said he had a dream and Cesar Chavez once said he had something for us to strive for.

In reality most of us have forgot all those things our people fought for. What happened? Now we find ourselves in left field and ignore the opportunities we have.

You see society judges a book by its' cover and never the literature that's inside of it. They label us every name in the book you could think of, example: thugs, gangsters, criminals etc. instead of focusing on a battle we can't win, our attention should be on educating ourselves and becoming someone better in society.

All is possible if we only strive for excellence and know that knowledge is power and the key to success.

There's only one chance in life and my advice is you take it. You see some people in society succeed and most fail, but only fate will determine my dream.

-Chimy, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is an awesome piece of commentary. Very impressive when you stepped up and read it aloud to the class. We know we'll read more thoughtful pieces from you down the road. You understand the need to break the stereotypes that are so quickly placed on you and what better way than to express yourself in The Beat and in the classroom! Educate us Chimy!

My Tree

If I was a tree a month ago…from the seeds, which are what and how I "WAS" doing things, I probably wouldn't be healthy or a green tree. I say this because I smoked "A LOT"…popped pills sometimes and also drank. I would say my tree would be tall, light, dry and loosing life… BUT!!…Now I DO NOT smoke or drink or pop anymore. So now if I plant a tree in five days…It would be a forever living tree.

-Doug, Alameda

From The Beat: Sounds like you may have salvaged some of the seeds from your old tree to plant again. It sounds like you've given yourself another chance, so stick to your plan and don't forget to take good care of your tree from here on out.

Destined

Everybody has a vision
In this head-on collision
Or to be another soul
Brainwashed by the television
But the other part of our brain
Tell us it's another part of us missing
While we think about the good times
Laughing and reminiscing
The devil's trying to kill me
But my faith is in my religion
Keeps trying to test me
But pass with no intermission
I am getting smarter
But the doctor gotta drain my resistance
Trying to obtain my success
But he furthered it in the distance
Man, I am in this championship
I am the Bulls
Y'all the Pistons
And we can go to war
Like the warlocks vs. the Christians
You don't gotta open your eyes
'Cause Ray Charles could see the tension
And it's mafia
I am the boss
I order hits and send the henchmen
Ya, I am at my max
You still in the weight room
What you benching?
I learned to never trust a smile
Because they betray you as innocent
And my mutation
To this situation
Is I adapt with no hesitation
Won't hesitate to send you
On a vacation
While your body left with this nation
I just dropped out of Thizz Nation
While ya soul retracing
Ain't no escaping
Gotta turn around and face it
Like breathing—it's basic
Y'all like the hot air balloon I deflated
And my brain is naked
And my last birthday
My cake hit
And my memories
You'll never be able to replace it
'Cause I am driven
Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: You say that you've learned to deal with this world filled with temptations, like the devil, that it's your ability to adapt and your faith that sustain you. Do you think that television is an invention of the devil, insofar as it tends to render people's brains dead? Even though you may not trust people's smiles, when you smile, you smile with your whole heart.

How Would Our Lives Be?

If I were you and you were me,
how would our lives be?
You tell me – how can I be like that?
A cold-hearted person, like you.
You judge me
just because
you're my tia, tio or cousin.
You think you know me,
but you have no clue.
If I were you and you were me
how would this be?
You wouldn't want to be me.
Being in my place, seeing what I see.
Naw, not even.
If you were me, you would be tripping.
You wouldn't be able to take it.

-Nora, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This piece really gets at the way we feel when our family judges us. Maybe when you get out, or even while you're locked up, you can send a letter to your tia, tio and cousin and tell them what you're going through to help them understand. Perhaps that will help them help you and heal your relationship.

Without A Choice

To joy life like to enjoy living rich
But how can we enjoy something in someone you love
always found dead and a ditch.
I use to enjoy every bit of crime in the town,
Into the night my brother body got found.
Anger build me to the top so I expressed the wrong way,
Now I'm doing time for something stupid that I'll say.

Watching the looks on my family faces as they fly
through,
It's my fault for thinking everybody in my own crew.
Now got time on my side I must maintain,
I break my family jail chains.
Hurt from being a low-life fool,
Playin' wit' money, guns, in drugs and thinking I'm cool.
Didn't have respect for those who loved me or myself,
I'm surprised everyone in my life hasn't gave up and left.

So now I'm gonna have a real life choice,
To open my eyes and face that voice.
Or do wrong all my life a number to the jails,
Until that day I'll rest in hell…

-Lil' Papa, Alameda

From The Beat: Hard piece. You are definitely confronting your pain and taking a good look at how you hurt yourself and others. We hope this is the beginning of the "new you" a better you a you that will touch and help others see that this is not the life to lead.

How I Feel

How I feel about the world:
I feel that you live and die. You live for what's worth your life and you die to stand for what you live for.
How I feel about the world:
I feel like minorities have been dogged out, the government threw us in poverty, drugs and violence to feel low about ourselves.
How I feel about the world:
I feel like the white people got their hands holdin' the world looking at us die.
How I feel about the world:
The world is making me stronger than ever.
How I feel about the world:
I feel smarter than the white man because of the world what it has made me.

-Elegant T, Alameda

From The Beat: Your suffering and outlook can help make you stronger, but only if you decide to fight. You don't fight with a gun, a knife, or a criminal mentality. You fight by becoming a success even in a world that wants you to be a failure. Get your education, get your career, become a model of hope for young people everywhere who get put down.

Stay On My Feet

When I look into the sky all I see is rain,
When I look into my life all I see is pain,
But it's ok because I know that I am gon' make it,
But sometimes the pain is so hard I can barely take it,
Sitting all alone got me thinking about the world,
So many lives messed up some boys some girls,
So got on my knees and prayed to god about my problems,
I pray for peace, hope, and knowledge so I can solve 'em,
Still I keep living I ain't never gone quit,
Sometimes I see myself in heaven sometimes in hell's pit,
It's alright I'm gone stay on my feet,
It's good to write how I feel, so I say thanks to The Beat.

-Maniac, Alameda

From the Beat: We only wish you'd all stay out and free so we could turn this paper into The Free Beat: No more prisons, no more room time, no more keys, no more court. You write with so much heart and skills, do you really want to waste all that on a life that kills?

I Had A Dream I Got Shot

I had a dream I got shot, I watched my momma watch me die
It felt so bad to see my momma's teary eyes
It was my last day on earth and I spent it at war
By the end of the day my momma's knees were on the floor
Hurtfully crying, she lost a son that she loved
Even though I gang banged and posted up selling drugs
I woke up out that dream and open my eyes
And realized I can't go on living this life
Of locked doors and county meals, it don't seem right
To live life behind walls because of some petty ass crime
So I'm gonna keep it alive,
Go for my dreams make something out of my life
I'm wasting precious time conversating with phonies
Talking about rims they don't got and they make believe homies
I got potential in me just in case you don't know me
I'm gonna live life to the fullest helping the homies
Live a lot better 'cause my folks a dying breed
So I'm gonna push the issue on living life to succeed
I'm not with all the hatred, envy, and greed
If I got money in my pockets a couple mouths I'm gonna feed
So I'm gonna keep my chest out and my chin up high
Pushing myself to live high-class life
So the next time you see me I'm living high-class life

-Lil' Gumby, Alameda

From The Beat: Another one right out of the park – and yeah, that's a nightmare that comes true for too many of our young people. So here's a topic for your next rhyme – write that High Class Life you're imagining. Is it high class because of money? Because of how you spend your time? Because of the way you stand tall and hold your self respect? Because of how you become a leader? What does "high class" mean to you?

If I Were You And You Were Me

I want them to see what us teenagers go through. I would like to change places with the judge and the haters and people that judge me. By sitting and talking to them won't work. I wanna know what do people go through every day and see the picture face-to-face. And I will also like them to know what I go through and what I feel.

If I was able to change places I would like to help that person and plant a seed and leave a message on their mind. I would want them to try and fix the issues I go through and I want them to realize it's difficult for me in this life that I am living, and I would want them to see from the day I was born and try to fight my battles every day and see what I gotta deal with. And how it feels when people put me down. But also see my good times.

I wish Bush could switch places with the people in Juvie, different countries and what our people go through, so he could stop this dirty stuff he does and for him to see and feel the pain us Latinos, Chinese, African American go through from being abused, poor, death, and hunger, broken homes, and kids not having family to go to.

Well take care Beat and I will write more for ya'll. Thank you for coming and letting me express myself on paper. Holla back,

-Lucero, San Francisco

From The Beat: Yes, wouldn't it be interesting if the President got a taste of what life for the poor is like. And it would also be important for people who are in charge of the system — judges, POs, counselors — to have to walk in your shoes for a minute to experience the difficulties you wrote about. At the same time, do you think there's anything you might learn about their lives if you traded places? Just as they have a lot of misperceptions about you and your life, do you think you also have some misperceptions about theirs?

If You Were Me

If you were me, I don't think you would be happy. I've been locked up for seven months and for something I didn't even do. Yes, it sucks. I got a family at home waiting for me. It also sucks because I was told the other day that I'm gonna be here for a while and I'm not going home any time soon. Hopefully my trial starts soon.

But if you were in my shoes, you would be in a bad position. My public attorney said I could be looking at 20 to 30 years behind bars. I try not to think of that though. I just keep my head up and look on the good side. School and stuff.

Anyways, I got a lot of family support right now. So that helps me a lot to keep me in a good mood. I guess I'm saying if you were put in my shoes, don't worry because the truth will all come out it the wash. To all my homies ,stay up.

-Ultra, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We really admire you for keeping a positive attitude under very stressful circumstances. We can't imagine how we would handle the knowledge that we might have to do that much time. On the other hand, if you are truly innocent, we hope the system works the way it's supposed to, and finds out the truth. Finally, if you do have to do serious time, that is not the end of the world. That family you love will still be there, loving you. You'll still be able to put words on paper. Books exist to be read. Education is a never-ending process. There is life after this...

I Don't Want It

I'm sitting on my porch watchin' the law as they post in their patrol car. So tell me why I feel like the enemy. They supposed to be here protecting me. I might have went too far helping to contribute to makin' they job hard.

If you knew how far I came, where I am and where I used to be... I don't want it. You can tell by the look in me. This gangster life ain't no longer in me!

We all go through some hard times, even if we're doing something right. Sometimes we wind up giving ourselves some more time. Day and night in this small cell! Can't wait till we go out there to prove to them we could do well.

-Green Eyes, Santa Clara

From The Beat: If you're really putting the gangster life behind you (and we hope you are), then those cops who patrol you rather than protect you might have to change their attitude and approach. You'll get what you give. And good luck!

What I Saw On TV

What it do Beat? Me, shhh, chillin', keepin' it lit to the fullest, ya heard me. I was born and raised in the 'hood, so you know when I turn on the television I see nothing but crime, such things as killings, robberies, car jacking and etc. Once you been in a place that long, you get immune to it so you grow up doin' negative things like killing people. But if you live in a place like that don't mean you have to do the thing you see growing up.

Some people don't see jail when they doin' crime because they mind be focused on what they doin'. But if people start thinking about positive things, most likely the go start doing it.

-Young Bundy, San Francisco

From The Beat: It is very hard to grow up surrounded by certain influences and not follow what you see. But that only explains how we act when we're still children, following what we see. There comes a time, though, when we mature and are able to judge whether what we've seen and been told is really in our interests, or whether we have to strike out in new directions, forging our own trails and creating our own unique lives. Sometimes you sound like you're ready to do just that (as in this piece) and other times you sound satisfied to just follow what's come before. You know what we hope for you... What do you hope for yourself?

It Is What It Is

Man, it is what it is, ya dig. I don't know what to feel. All I know is to think big. But still, I have a lot of stress on my wig. It's like I'm blowing fuses from frustration, I'm finna blow off the lid.

Sometimes I don't mind whether I die or live. I say it is what it is out on my own, developing, trying to mature by the year. I grew stronger. I'm not ashamed to drop tear. But still, there's nothing I fear. I can't really sit here and drown myself in sorrow or misery, nor can I beat myself over the situation. Under these circumstances, I'm powerless. I can only leave it up to the Lord.

-Payne, San Francisco

From The Beat: You're not altogether powerless in here because you still have the power to think, to read, to educate yourself and to develop. In fact, by telling us that you are stronger, that you aren't ashamed to cry, you are also telling us that you are using the power you have in exactly the right ways. Now, when you're on the outs, you have a whole lot more power to make choices that either move your life in the direction you want to go, or leave you behind in places like this. What lies ahead for you?

Don't Front

I came into this situation with an open state of mind,
after all coming here mean you will obviously do time,
But one thing I won't do is front about who I am:
Yah, I put myself into a bad place, but to me I'm like every Joe, Jack and Pam.
I won't front like the way I was raised got me here today.
I won't lie: My mom cared and nurtured me in every single way.
I will admit, we had bad times in my life.
We struggled, but I always got right back up and strived.
I won't front that I was a hustler making money on the streets,
but I did get a job as a young teen -- You know, I had to get paid every week.
My friends weren't gangsters and that's perfectly fine by me,
friends are the people that look at stuff and see what you see.
I won't front that I need your approval to be who I want to be,
you can hate judge or not like it but I love being me.

-Monica, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Staying true to your self is really important, especially in a place where people are always putting up walls. You say you love being yourself, but does that love include wanting to change for the better?

Blaming Us

I turn on the TV...
And all I see is the news channel being two-faced...
They bullshhh about streets being at warfare...
Betweens us browns, blacks, and Asians...
Us killing each other for the wrong reasons...
What they ain't poppin' up on NBC, ABC, MSNBC, CBS, and Disney channel...
Is their affiliation to the war in Iraq...
Because of the news stations there's weapons out there...
Instead of blaming themselves for the warfare in Iraq...
They blame us for the killings...
That's what I see on and off screen...

-Vaga, San Francisco

From The Beat: This is an interesting perspective, Vaga. How do you see the media's responsibility for the War in Iraq, and how does their responsibility lessen your own for the war in these streets? Who's responsible for that?

Congratulations, Graduate!

Wussup lil' sis
I done heard the good news
I heard that you did it and that you graduated
from middle schoo'
Damn that's coo'
Sorry I wasn't there to see you walk
but understand this
That I love you very much
and there ain't no fakin'
My love for you ain't no mistake
And, uh,
I want you to know
that I'll always be there for ya
'Cause you my lil' sister
and I'm yo' second oldest brother
Same goes for the family
We gots to look out for one another
You know how it goes
and you know how it is
It seems like it was yesterday
when you was a kid
But look at you now
going on to be a teen
I know you pretty sure
you wanna be what you wanna be
And if you have a dream
don't let no one tell you
it can't come true
'cause anything is possible
It's all up to you
A'ight, sis', gots to go
To er'body in here,
Bye
Stay malosi (Strong)
Sa Love.

-Tiny Samoa, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We can feel your pride and love bursting through these pages. We hope that your little sister's success spurs you on to greater challenges for yourself. When you get out from under this situation, she will still need her loving big brother, so do what you must to get back to her.

Juvenile Hall

This juvenile hall shhh is getting' old. I been don' this shhh since I was twelve years old. I'm seventeen now. They made this new juvenile hall, thinkin' we gonna be more scared. Man, they got this shhh lookin' like a boys an' girls club recreation center. They put a toilet and sink in our room, so we don't have to come out our room.

For this new juvenile hall building to be worse than the other one, it sure do seem like we be out our room more than in the old halls. They gave us windows in our room that make room time go by much faster. Man, I'm done with this shhh, on my mama. Some people just say they don't wanna come back, but that's just juvenile hall talk. I'm serious, though. I'ma do my best not to come back to juvenile hall aka Juvenile Hall Justice Center... they even changed the name from YGC to Juvenile Hall Justice Center and ninjas here get no damn justice at all. Man, it's ya boy, Young Quez.

-Quez, San Francisco

From The Beat: We believe you when you say you've had enough of this semi-slavery called lock-up. But, besides committing yourself to change, can you tell us what steps you plan to take that will lead you away from here and not lead you back.

What My Tree Will Look Like...

Right now my tree will look like a young man caught up in the system trying to get out. You would see a young man trying to make the best out of a bad situation, someone who tries to stay positive even when it seems that there is no hope. You would see a man that's educated beyond his years of life, but still that made a bad decision and that is paying the price.

But you also see a young man that ain't going to give up no matter what the situation is.

-No Name, San Francisco

From The Beat: What a pity that we don't know who you are! This is why we always stress to start your piece with your name! If you're here for "a bad decision," then you know what to change when you get out. Making that change is a prescription for the good and decent life that you want.

My Pain

Take my pain away
Bury it in a pond of my emotions
Make me feel safe and sane
Because I don't want to feel this way
I want to live in a different world
And be free
I'm surrounded by people who won't give me a chance
But they don't even know me
I want to be with the people I love
Being locked up has me thinking about so many things
About my life on the outs
And the joy that my freedom brings
The system really got me thinking twice
About the people I kick it with
And the way I live my life
Is it worth smoking blunts and rackin' bottles day after day
I want to go home and live life to the fullest the right way

-Princess Harmony, San Francisco

From The Beat: Take advantage of the people around you who do want to give you a chance (and there are people around you who do). But the most important of these people is you! You've realized that your freedom is too precious a gift to be so lightly given away for a blunt or a drink. That's a lesson worth its weight in gold!

Another Day In The Ghetto

Bloody sidewalk
Where murder took place
Gunshots ring
Bodies drop
Just another day in the ghetto
The place where I come from
I was brought up in a place
Where nobody gave a damn
Everybody was somebody
Except me
So I tried to become someone
Tried too hard
This is where it took me
I wish I was born to fame
But that didn't happen
But that just another day
In the ghetto

-Lil' Ant, San Francisco

From The Beat: It's not that everybody around you was somebody, it's that you felt yourself to be nobody, and that's just plain wrong. You don't need to make yourself famous by doing things that lead you to lose your freedom. What kind of exchange would that be? Take the longer view (and the harder one, the one requiring more strength, more courage) and gain your fame within your family by finishing school, going to college, earning a decent living the legit way. The day you commit yourself to that path is the day it won't be "just another day in the ghetto."

Television

What's up with The Beat? Man, this ya boy GF. When I turn on the TV, I see money, guns, clothes, girls, cars, and phat homes. And because of that I'm the way I am now. I live for that shhh. But that's what got me here and I didn't know the flipside of that. If I knew I was gone be locked up for tryna get money the only way I know how, then I would've plotted on another get-rich-quick scheme.

But for every action, there's a reaction and now I know that. Feel me, I just hope people learn from my mistakes and not learn the hard way. And for all out there, remember all money ain't good money 'cause money can't buy freedom or a new life. Y'all get to look at the shhh vice versa when you see the ballers on TV. What you think it took for them to get these? These struggles, pain, end suffering.

-GF, San Francisco

From the Beat: We're not sure how TV led you to believe you could get money illegally without facing consequences. There are enough cop shows on TV to see the other side of that glitter that most TV shows seduce you with. In any case, now that you've experiencing the "reaction" to your action, what is your plan for the future?

If I knew I was gone be locked up for tryna get money the only way I know how, then I would've plotted on another get-rich-quick scheme.

I'm Tired...

I'm tired of all this crime
All us block kids getting time
To get out the game gotta play sports, or spit rhymes
I'm tired of seeing my patnas get shot
While doing nothing but being from a certain block
I'm tired of coming to this hall
'Cause I go past law limitations
Endin' up in the same situation
I'm tired of women bein' degraded
And it's over and over, reiterated
I'm tired of youngstas killin' they own population
So they could hold up a reputation
When will it stop?
When will it end?
Some people go to the limit
And befriend their friend
I'm tired, just so, so tired
Sometimes it's even hard for me
A black female to get hired
I'm trying my best
But I can't speak for the rest
I hope as you read this
You will lightweight be blessed.
RIP Jaee Logan.

-Lady J Alameda

From The Beat: Everything you've shared is true and reflective on what's going on in our society today? If you could speak for the rest in terms of coming up with a solution, what would your solution be? What do you believe are some things that we as a society can do? For those who think they're trapped in that lifestyle, what are some things that they could do in order to leave that costly lifestyle behind? When do you think all this started? Do you think that it can ever slow down, if not, stop? Why, or why not? We thank you for blessing us all with this insight, and can only hope that you continue to enlighten us all! Not just from within the walls, but especially when you are back in the heart of all this chaos!

Here's A Thought

There's more to life than drugs, guns, and violence
there's more to you than smoking, being ignorant, and doing nothing.
Think about it the time you stand around hanging with friends,
just looking around at each other.
You can be expanding intellectually,
expanding your options as to where your going to be in life.
Mean while you stand not doing anything and you choose the option to rob a person,
run in some ones' home.
Yeah, you might be successful the first one or two times, but what if the next time you get killed!" Then what?
Most people are lucky enough to go to jail, and have the chance to think
about what they can do to prevent making another poor decision.
Life is short and there isn't enough room for error.
I mean you can mess up twice but the third time isn't a mistake!
Be conscious of what you do, admit when you're wrong and face the consequences...

-Straight Knowledge, Alameda

From The Beat: We wish you wrote your name on this deep thoughtful piece. You speak volumes and we can only hope the readers feel your words!

One Way

On TV I see Bush raising gas prices,
the gang bangers gettin' cheese like a group of mices.
They roll dices, one season raps up with spices.
You holdin' the round table dog, give me a few slices.
TV is stupid; the media hypnotizes the public.
Wars on the television, people dyin', no one loves it.
Just because of it, I click to SpongeBob,
while eating a crabby patty, instead of sad, I'm happy.
The news is full of people who tell a lot of stories,
some true but, some of them fake like Toy Story.
They ruined Michael Jackson's rep into a child molester.
They mess with other celebrities never getting better.
This rap is a random, I rushed it with some random thoughts... Television to me is just random talk.

-Da Pizza Man, San Francisco

From The Beat: Yeah, there are a lot of random thoughts thrown into this piece, but even so, it still has a message. (For example, who "ruined Michael Jackson's rep" if not Michael Jackson himself?) In fact, maybe you chose to be random to demonstrate your idea that TV is also random. In any case, with the skills you demonstrate here, we're hoping you'll write us something that isn't rushed and isn't random, but expresses your thoughts on any topic.

My People

My people are beautiful--full lips and eyes that sparkle.
They are strong, they are workers.
My people' skin is priceless ebony, coa coa brown, and silky smooth.
Unforgettable faces, from unforgettable places.
My people are beautiful!
My people are beautiful with joyous spirits--some funny, some stern.
But all my people are beautiful.

-J-Mak, Marin

From The Beat: You're so right to be proud of your people, J-Mak. How do you fit in with your people? How would you describe how you look? Your spirit?

Why Blame The Hood?

What's good, this Lil Mousie from Livermore! Man I'm sick of all these people blaming the hood or the gang for your incarceration! Man that's some sucka shhh.. don't blame the homies!

When you got rushed in the hood or put on the knowledge of the gang, you know what you was getting into! You were warned you were to make sacrifices and put in the work to maintain a soldier! So don't say that it's just because we from here and they from there, so we got to funk. You should know there's history behind it all! So don't blame the homies… blame yourself for blaming the homies.

-Lil' Mousie

From the Beat: There is history there, but it's a messed up history. Sure people feel love and loyalty, like soldiers in a war, but it's a useless war that claims countless bodies and souls each year. Ask yourself this – what's the history of Latin Americans in the U.S.… how did the gangs first form, and why? Once you know that, you'll know why we call BS on this funk.

The News

When I turn on the TV and I am going through the channels something grabs my attention -- I stop and pay good attention and it's the news.

Lots of people are getting killed. Lots of people are getting killed for dope, gangs, or something stupid. Well that's all I got to say.

-Lazy

From The Beat: It's good that you pay attention to the news – too many people don't. But now, you might have heard this expression: "If you don't like the news, make some of your own." We need to stop the killing, and it has to come from the streets up, not the other way around. How do we do it?

I Miss Everybody

I miss my girl, I miss everybody. I miss my house. I miss my girl's beautiful face. I miss my cousin (RIP Tony all my life). I miss everybody.

Love got a lot of feel of my family, and the only other thing I love is my girl. I miss her so much she always make me happy. My heart be beatin' so fast for her, and when I go to sleep I cry in my dream every nights.

I miss everybody.

-Danny

From The Beat: And we bet they miss you just as much if not more – so do your program, get home, and stay there!

It Ain't Right

The life I live, it ain't right,
Stuck in the hall a ninja can't sleep at night,
Tossing and turning, wondering if my family gonna be alright,
Grandma worrying while I be in da streets all night,
I wish I could change for my family sake,
And mine,
Running out of time,
Gotta stay on my grind,
Gotta shine,
Gotta be a street star,
Trying to get far,
Hella bars,
But can't make it in da studio boy.

-Studio Boy

From the Beat: "I wish I could change." But you can change, if you want to. You got the heart/you got the smart/now all that's left is you got to start.

I Got A Bone to Pick

I was recently listening to me radio on Sunday and I heard your guys down talking Mac Dre. He actually doesn't promote violence, he raps basically about how stuff happens in the bay: Girls, pimping, money, and he talks about violence that does happen.

Everybody that know Domo knows that I live off Mac Dre and he actually doesn't influence me to do drugs. Because I choose to doesn't mean he influences me.

A famous saying he always said is "Drugs Don't Harm Nobody But My Body!" The fact that he named his label Thizz Ent doesn't mean they have to do drugs. Mr. F.A.B. is Thizz Ent and he doesn't pop pills.

So why is it that people down talk Thizz Ent. I actually feel that you down talk Thizz Ent you down talk Dre and this disrespects towards the bay because he is a Bay Area Legend.

-Domo

From the Beat: Thanks so much, Domo, for putting your disagreement on paper, defending your favorite artist, and opening up the debate. That shows a real maturity – the kind of maturity that we need more of out in the streets, where people settle their disagreements with guns instead of words. And despite that radio argument (which by the way reflects the thoughts of one facilitator only, not The Beat), we agree that there are far worse culprits out there than Thizz Ent. Things like poverty, terrible schools, institutional racism and police brutality. And we respect Mac Dre: He was a victim too, a victim of a culture that boasts about killin' and living wild, and planning for tonight instead of planning for the future. He deserved better than the life he described, and so do you.

You See

You see me walking down the street
Minding my own business. I turn around
See my sister get popped in the head,
And I am the only witness.
You see the pain in my eyes and the
Blood on my thigh.
I never thought it would….

-Sahmoney

From the Beat: It's amazing how you managed to capture so much fear and emotion in just seven lines of poetry. It's like a snapshot where you make us feel the pain and shock and loss as suddenly as you did. We are so sorry you lost your sister, will you write another poem telling us what she was like?

Trade Places: RIP Moe

To one of my favorite cousins in the sky,
I wanna trade places.
I see why you was willing to go,
Close friends have many faces.
Is heaven really as spacious as the preachers say it is?
Nah don't tell me…
I'll find out for myself.
But first I gotta find a way to man up and put my lawless lifestyle on the shelf.
I'm gonna learn from yo' mistakes,
Please forgive me if I'm wrong,
But God forbid if I sleep over a broad.
I miss you Moe,
I wish I could rewind the time,
Switch body and mind.
Then lose my mind to the gauge,
So you could remember my name,
And write the poem on this page!
From yo lil ninja,

-Lil' Sticky

From The Beat: This is a poem powerful enough to be heard in that spacious sky – and while we're sorry you lost your boy, we're glad to hear that you're here to put it on the page. So what were the mistakes he made that you've chosen to learn from?

How I Deal With This?

How should I deal with all this (me being in here I mean). I just can't take this no more. It's getting so hard. I even pray and ask God to help me, but it just seems like he wants me to break down and start cryin and go crazy in here.

But I just ask him to give me some strength to get all this over with And I feel like I'm holding on to a lil' faith. But I know I have to keep my head up and stay strong for me and my family.

How can I deal with this, when you got people tryin to bring you down with them. But at the same time I'm sayin' to myself be good. Stay strong. Avoid peer negativity and stay to myself.

I can only hold so much in at a time and if I let it out I think I'm going to hurt somebody up in here. And this is the best way I know how to let go of all this stress that's in me.

What else way that I can do it? I can't talk

because every time I try to these people in here think you stupid or even worse, slow. Gone.

-Alex

From The Beat: You already know what to do and you've BEEN doing it. You struggle, you maintain, and when it gets too much, you write about your feelings to take the weight off. As for crying...that's a sign of strength, not weakness. It's a much better way of getting rid of stress than going off on someone, don't you think?

Lost Days

We're livin' in reality, and we need to check ourselves
And stop actin' ignorant and learn to respect ourselves
Stay educated so that we can help ourselves.
The whole object to this game we play is to stay free and alive
But instead we rather struggle then to strive.
As I live in my cell everyday
I watch the lost days pass me by.

-D'Tay

From the Beat: What a great call to action – you are right, you all deserve much more than you get, and much more than you give each other! But if you can use this time to reflect, make new plans for self respect, than your lost days might just be how you find your path.

Why?

I don't know why I act the way I do maybe because I try to be somebody I'm not. Why do people treat me this way so bad? I don't know what I be doin' so wrong for them to do that to me, like I'm some kind of mean person or something

I just wish that people would be more nice to me. You got like two or three people that's cool with me and everybody else don't like me at all...and if you thinking what I think y'all thinking, I don't care what people think about me. I'm just putting what I feel down on paper. I playin it smart because you got people in here sayin' stuff but not doin' nothing at all.

Why do people act like that? And why do people act so hard when they know they not? That's one thing I don't get.

And why do they put us away like we some stupid people or something?

-Lil' Alex

From The Beat: That last question might just be part of your answer... being locked up in one room with a bunch of strangers doesn't exactly bring out the best in people, and deep down everyone is sad, scared, lonely, etc... but it's human nature to hide behind toughness (like how a cat's fur goes up when it's scared, to make it look bigger than it is). So long as you stop following and learn to trust yourself, you'll get through this!

You Say

You say you know who I am, and what corner I claim.
But have you been a step in my shoes or in my life when it rained?
You say you got my back through thug and thin.
But where was you but the Lord when came to the end.
You say you looking down on me, and I don't need the heavens above.
But when you really look at it, that's only the Lord's love.

-Sahmoney

From The Beat: It sounds like this love and faith gets you through the dark times and helps you find strength. It's sure more trustworthy than anyone who promises to stick by you through "thug and thin"!

Stay Positive

I would like to tell everybody doin' time keep ya head up and stay positive. Next time just think more and try to be on your toes more. Get something out of what you do 'cause ain't no sense of sitting down with nothing to show you it.

Just stay positive and pray to the god Almighty.

-Shadie Bo

From The Beat: Good advice – and to it we'd add, follow the rules of probation. Don't give the system an excuse to bring you back in!

Time is Hard

Time is hard living on the streets:
no family, no job, tryin' to make a living on the block
selling rocks in the streets.
Women selling they body on the street just to eat
And to help feed they kids and keep them
On they feet -- but it more to it.
But this is a demo of people that time is hard for.

-Moe P

From The Beat: It's true – you can bet if we all had to spend some time trying to survive on the streets, we'd be a lot less judgmental of the people that have to do it. But there are ways and programs to help people get out of that hard life – if you needed one, would you join it?

Brainwash

When I turn the TV on I see the same thing all the time. Media tries to brain wash you. A lot of the movie companies are owned by the same people, so you see a lot of the same stuff. I've been locked up fo' a minute so I haven't watched TV in a minute.

What I wanna see on TV is more stuff about the Bay, like on the music channels. The bay never gets no love.

-Kenny

From The Beat: When you turn on the TV it's all about money, as if money can buy you happiness. Do you think that's true? It does seem like a lot of the people in here are hear because they were looking for money, for cars, chains, fits, etc. Why do you think that is?

Maintaining

Well Beat, I hope I get out on EM. I've been here for about two months. I got here on my b-day, May 11th. I got to get out for my family. My dad ain't doing what he is supposed to be doing. He is a crack head and he went to jail. I got caught like a month ago and he's in Santa Rita right now. Well just wish me luck. If I don't get out I'll keep writing.

-Bones

From The Beat: You're right, your family needs you right now. Keep us posted on how things turn out. We would love to hear from you when you're back on the outs.

If I Were You and You Were Me

If I could change places with anybody it would be a homeless person. For some reason I want to see how that person go through everyday life.

I see at least three on every home pass, panhandling, sleeping on the street etc. I want to know how they have no one to love or love them and nowhere to stay and why they won't go to a program to help them out.

If a homeless person was me, he would be a stunna with new clothes every week and cars with a place to stay and people to love them and he would enjoy everyday life.

-Lonnie

From The Beat: This shows some serious heart – just the fact that you notice and think about people's suffering that way. As for being a "stunna," with the clothes and cars – is that what you want in life? What about your future, what are your future goals?

If You Were Me

If you were me, first off you wouldn't wanna be me
I live life as it comes but I still hope to succeed
If you were me, you might be locked up for a crime
But I don't whine I just sit back and handle my time
If you were me, you'd be happy because you got a good mother
I sit at home eating food and sometimes smoke with my brother
If you were me, you'd have to adjust to these streets
Cause if you're not known where I'm from you could end up deceased
If you were me, you'd have to do some dirt
I post on the block trying to get off some work
If you were me you'd have the greatest of homies
I don't worry about suckas, snitches or phonies
If you were me, you'd have a powerful brain
I know right from wrong I know different from same
If you were me. You probably won't got to school
I just be in the hood acting a fool
If you were me, you might be drinking a lot
I drink Henney and Remy but still I run from the cops
If you were me, keep dreaming 'cause you not gonna be
I be too unique so you wouldn't be me

-Lil' Gumby

From The Beat: Funny, after reading this, we're not sure if we'd want to be you either. We'd want the talent, the heart, the skills and the insight. We'd want the strength we know you have inside. But we wouldn't want to have to live wearing a violent mask, always on the run like a mouse trapped in a maze, running after cash, burying homies, and having no real power because the state controls you. I guess what we're saying is we'd want the life you can have, we wouldn't want the life you seem to be choosing!

Help Each Other

If I were you and you were me, I will help you with your life and I would want you to help me with my life and help other people with their life -- to help them stay out of trouble and not do bad stuff.

There is too many people gettin' locked up, and we need to help people stay out of jail. We need to help people get jobs instead of robbing people, so they can get a job and get some real money so people won't keep coming back in here.

-Ray

From The Beat: Your words cut straight to our hearts, so in honor of you, this week we'll be bringing in a list of places you can call that might help you all find jobs when you are released, as well as mentorship and help with your private struggles and schoolwork.

I Wanna Get Rich

If I was you and you was me, you would know what it's like to grow up
Without a dad, around a mother that's on welfare
Then you would know what it's like to drop out of school, sell dope, and run with ninjas who don't care
Tryna accumulate money so me and my people can live right that's why I snort powder, tote guns, and stay up all night
I wanna get rich, that's why I do what I do
I never had plans of going to college, because I dropped out of school
You could try and knock me if you want to it's all on you
I believe deep in my heart that I'm gonna get rich
Because I'm good at what I do and I'm dedicated to this
I'm out there when it's hot or when it's cold,
When it's rolling or when it's slow,
I'm even out there when it's raining without a coat
Because I realized that patience is a virtue, and when I'm in jail,
I don't sell dreams to them people sayin' I'ma change when I get out
Because I'm gone always do what I do
And jail don't stop a ninja from
Doing the same old shit
We do our time go home and it's back to the same shhh.
It's all on you if you wanna change.

-Torrin

From the Beat: There's a man named Jack Jacqua, a friend of The Beat, and a friend of incarcerated youth all, over, who used to say that it's some of the smartest kids in the ghetto who end up in jail, because they're the ones who have the most ambitious, who are most hungry to make their lives better "by any means necessary." We feel like this piece of yours proves it. But the means you've chosen might kill you, lock you up, or worse, turn your heart into a place you wouldn't want to live in anymore. Is that really what you want?

How I Feel

This Lil' Suave feel me. I just wanna say what it is you know me I'm thuggin' to the fullest. Me I'm just hoping I can complete the program

They about to send to me.

The judge said this is my last chance. If I don't complete the program I am gonna go to the Y. I'm gonna try to finish but you know how that shhh go. It be hella pissy and a ninja like me ain't made for nothing like that. That's why I always run from wherever they send me. But this time I hope I finish it so I can get on with my life. Beat I just wanted to let you know what's up.

-Lil' Suave

From The Beat: Good God Lil Suave – this is your wake up call. What would it take for you to understand just how bad the Y is... it's nowhere you want to be. Might as well call it "Thuggin' to the bullest" –as in b.s.

When I Get Out I'm Going To Get My Life Together

I'm going to get out of High School and I am going to go straight to college, and I'll play football for college.

I'm going to stay away from people that get people in trouble. But when I get out of High School, I'm going to go to college to try to own my own business. I want my sister and brother to do the same thing, so I get to show them better, for they can do better than me.

-Ray

From The Beat: Putting these goals on paper is definitely the first step towards achieving them. Now tell us, what's the next step, and the one after that? The better you plan, the better your chances of success.

What Would You Do?

If you saw from my eyes what would you see?
What would you think?
Would you cry at night?
Would you ask for advice?
Would you hang?
Or would your change you ways?

-Joseph

From the Beat: We wish we had an answer for you on all of this... the only way we could answer would be by hearing more about what YOU see and feel.

If I Were You And You Were Me

If I was you
And you was me
I really couldn't see that because I love me
Me who I am
And me who I be
I could never see me being a follower but always to lead
This is not a rap
This is not a verse
This is a poem to let you know where I stand on earth
It's hard to change and plus to see
But I can let you know it's that beast in me
And for what I say
And for what I do
You could never knock me for keeping it true
Damn ain't that beautiful I am me.

-Keith

From The Beat: Yes, it is beautiful! We would like to see you write another one like this, but this time talking to that "beast in you". Can the beast be tamed?

I want To Be Stress Free

I want to be stress free for a lot of reasons. Some days I have a hard
time adjusting to the environment. I'll be good one day and upset the
next. There are different situations and problems happening to people
close to me at home. My brother is acting up, my mom is steady
risking her life, my girl is acting abnormal, and I get more nervous
and scared. I want my life to be more than it is.

-Doug E Fresh

From The Beat: You have more adult worries to deal with than most adults, we wish we could take some of that weight off you. The big thing is to ask – what can I control, what can't I control. If you focus on what you can control, like what you do, whether you spend your inside time studying and reading and growing, and then later how you decide to spend your outside time, do you think it might make it easier to deal with what you can't control?

What's Up Beat?

You know how now days grown ups be talking about how hella ninjas be dressin alike and that we should all be different from each other. But what about our parents? Back in the day our parents used to be havin' afro's and platform shoes and shhh. I'm sure their parents told them not to wear them shoes or their hair that way but they did it anyway so why can't we? But for some reason they're making such a big deal about it in our generation. I don't know, do you?

-Cody

From The Beat: Your piece made us smile. What you wrote is SO true. Every generation develops its own style, and usually the older generation doesn't like it!

They Tell Me

They tell me to be a man
But they don't understand
They ain't lived my life
They ain't paid this price
They ain't had this blues
Try walking in my shoes

-Lil' L

From the Beat: A lot of the people who tell you to change aren't doing it because they don't understand what you're going through... they're trying to save you from a future they know about you and don't want you to have to go through!

How I Cheated Death: RIP Joseph Lee

Late May, my homie, friend, and loved one Joseph Lee was shot and killed East Twentieth . That day was a tragic day because that day I was supposed to go kick it with him and chill, but I couldn't find him.

Later on at around 10:30, I was walking with a couple friends and heard several gunshots and at that moment I felt weird -- so we started walking faster, and I was on a block over and East Twentieth. But it was a weird experience

Then a day later my cousin tells me that Fat Joe died, and I was like yesterday? And he was like, yeah, on such and such on East Twentieth, and then I was like "I was gonna walk on that block, but I took the one over because it's faster."

I was shocked when I thought about it and then I was like, damn, them gunshots I heard was Joe that got blasted. But then them shots could of been for me and my friends.

But I wanted to get home faster, and it was a good choice that I wanted to go home.

-Thizzy

From The Beat: The idea of hearing those shots and then realizing who they were for is so chilling, like something out of a nightmare. But then losing someone you care about to street violence is a true nightmare. We're grateful that you survived – it's like you've been given a second chance in this world. What are you going to do with that chance?

In Need Of Watering

My tree is looking like penitentiary or YA.

My tree would look like going to school, going to college, getting a job, having kids, watching my little brother do the same thing. And having a big family.

-A sick tree

From The Beat: Change brother change! It can be done!

My Tree Will Look Like

My tree would look like I've been to jail four times and I graduated from high school doing the right things wit my life. I play basketball for my school. I got a job tryin' to change my life around and make my mom proud so she can smile and say she is proud of me. I don't want to be comin' in and out of jail fo' the rest of my life. And I don't want to have to watch over my shoulders everywhere I go.

-Gg

From The Beat: You list some really important reasons for turning things around. Not having to look over your shoulders is a huge relief, -lots of former gang members can tell you that. Since you are determined and focused, have you thought about maybe transferring to a different school for a clean start? Or is it important to stay where you're at for hoops?

If You Really Knew Me, You Would Know This...

...that I am a brilliant person. I'm bright and very smart. I love sports, I love to play them. I love to have a lot of friends and I love being out with my friends and partying.

I love being clean and I love having money. I love traveling, and going places I've never been.

-The Kid

From The Beat: These are all great things to love – so long as the partying is safe and the money is legit. Where would you go want to travel, and where have you been so far?

A Letter To The New Me

I've been in this system for a little while now. I've come back a couple of times since my first. I have just now realized that it's time for a change. A change in me, the company I keep, and the environment I surround myself in. I will no longer sell drugs, skip school and disobey my parents, or the law. I will no longer street bang. I will try not to be rude and disrespectful. These things have effed up my life and I want to be a better person and beat the system.

I will go to school, I will get a job and I will get off probation. I will obey my parents and the law. I will have a better life.

-Lady J

From The Beat: You know what you've done and you know what you need to do. Hopefully you can use the painful memories of where bad choices has led you, so that you can make more wiser ones. Keep yourself motivated and focused. Surround yourself with those who are supportive of you wanting more and better for yourself. How much happier will you truly be without the chaos and drama? Doesn't that sound so much sweeter? You are deserving of all that and more. Just give yourself a REAL chance, especially when things are rough.

Cheating Death

This was about two and a half years ago. I was working in San Francisco. There was these Mexicans who looked kind of gangsta, but said they were going to give me $100 each. We parked about a mile away from where they picked me up. By some stairs so I can do one at a time and the others sit out. I did the first one but first he gave me the money. The second one went cool. The third one started off cool. He gave me the money and I put it in my Newport box. Then I did him.

He reached up to a glove compartment and told me to give him all my money. I had $500 on me. I didn't, so he cut my throat. I had my clothes on so I ran and left my cell phone in his car, but I took my money. I was bleeding really bad. I thought I was going to bleed to death. Thank God I didn't.

I used an old man's phone to call my dude. He seen what car I got in. He found them guys and shot all of them. Now he's in San Quentin on Death Row.

I didn't know at the time but I was pregnant. I have a beautiful son that's his and named after him. I feel like I am responsible for it, but he didn't need to do that.

It was the worst experience of my life.

-Tiffany

From The Beat: It must have been very hard for you to share and relive your "Cheating Death" experience with us. It's unfortunate that there's very little respect and value for life nowadays. We were definitely captivated and speechless by your story and sure that there are others out there, who may have shared experiences along those lines. Sharing this story has put you in a position to where we can't help but to wonder, how are you today? If there was one, priceless lesson in this experience that you've come away with, what would you say it is? We hope you and your son are healthy, well and have moved beyond this traumatizing experience. Because if this experience wasn't enough to leave such a life threatening mark on you, then what will it take?

Let's Talk About Going Dumb

If I turned on the TV and suddenly seen myself on TV acting a fool I would be dumbfounded to see how foolish I would look to go dumb and to hear people say "go dumb." Sometimes I really think about do we really "go dumb" on a subconscious level? Well, I refuse to go dumb any longer. From now on I go smart and encourage others to do the same. RIP to all the people who died over the years to violence.

-Mook

From The Beat: You make a very interesting point! E-40 is making lots of money off of the "go dumb" craze and the hyphy movement. But you take a look at the psychology behind it: when teenagers are "going dumb" and then doing violent and/or reckless things, are they undervaluing themselves? Putting themselves at risk? Ultimately, it is up to each of us to act smart and look out for ourselves.

Murder on TV

Man if I turned on the TV and seen me and my family on the news because me and my brother had got shot. I got grazed and my brother got hit in the leg man. When I saw that I was like man this ain't cool what is going on in this world? But every time I turn on the TV all you see is people getting killed. It is a shame I miss you big brother!

I love you! I love all who rest in peace.

-B

From The Beat: So you saw your family on the news after the shooting? That must have been a trip. Why do you think there is so much coverage of murders on the news? Should there be even more coverage? How does the media present violence in the hood?

Family

Family, I miss my family so much, I feel extremely guilty I have stressed both of my parents out so bad lately and I just want to leave here to see them and show them I'm gonna turn my life around I just want to be happy. I wish I could just hug both my parents right now and tell them how much I love them.

I wish I could just go home and spend a lot of time with them and just eat dinner with them or watch a movie with them or anything with them as long as I'm spending quality time with them.

-Unknown

From The Beat: How long will it be before you can spend that quality time with your parents? You've got the right ideas and even if you have a while before you'll get to see them again, if you do your best in jail you'll be out sooner than later.

If I Were You and You Were Me

If I was born in America ain't no telling what I would be. What I do know is my street IQ would be at best.I am a quick learner but I learn from experience so I'm stupid in that sense. People used me because they knew me more then I knew me. Not listenin to what my parents not because they did know what they was talking about but because I had no respect for them life here is hard being from a different culture.

I have no communication skills but I'm workin' my hardest to change. I would say the main reason why I'm in here right now is because I didn't assert myself in the proper way an then I got desperate so I did what ever I can for quick money.

-Dslk

From The Beat: What must you do so you don't find yourself ina desperate situation? Was it worth it? Not. Now you sit thinking your life over, what plans do you have to live life free of incarceration and street life?

Always Runnin'

If I shall die just give me a gun and I shall live my life
on the run
I'll ask the man to just let me stunt
I love to get high so fire up a blunt.
The way I was raised was absolutely the wrong way
who's responsible 'cause somebody got to pay
I never asked to be brought up like this locked up and
locked down isn't life a bee
pissing on my head and telling me it's rain I've been on
earth for 16 years
I ain't just came play for fun or fight until you're dead
planes aren't the only thing flying there's also
discharged lead
life to me is a big war but you can't tell who'll win
what would you say the side of righteousness or the side
of sin
I now know I'm strong but I know I used to be weak
so when I'm dead and gone if you want you can have my
soul to keep
life isn't a joke but most of the time that's exactly what
it seems to be
I don't believe in the devil or Jesus but the one and only
God
so before I go I just want you to know my name is Maine
but I pray to the man to keep me on my feet and
whenever I die take my soul to keep.

-Maine

From The Beat: You recognize how wrong your life has been, so why continue down the same path? Wake the hell up and take charge of your life! Don't throw your life away to the system! Make something special out of your life, what are you waiting for? You have your God by your side and you have your talents, use them to succeed!

If I Were You and You Were Me

If I were you and you was me,
I will be free you will be locked up.
You will be mad I will be glad.
I would sleep in my own bed wear my own cloths eat
myown food.
I will be the happiest man alive if I get to go home
soon!!!

-Wu

From The Beat: Hopefully you take full advantage of your freedom. Handle your probation right!

I Turned On The TV And Saw

When I turned on the television, which I hardly did, I would hope that I didn't see people on the news that were murdered. Or that the homicide rate in Oakland soared up. Most of the time the only thing I would watch on TV was BET to watch music videos, or comedy. I occasionally watch movies, but I really didn't like them too much especially when the commercials cut me off, when the movie started to get exciting and good. I really don't watch TV too much because it gets boring after a while. I had too many things to do, like get money, even in the worst way.

-Tiffany

From The Beat: You mentioned, "not liking to see people get murdered, or the homicide rate climbing." But then you also mentioned, "having too many things to do, like getting money even in the worst way." It sounds like maybe your actions could have been right there next to the stories that you didn't want to see on TV. We believe that you have a talent and/or gift that if cultivated, can get you the money you need, and not in the worst way. Very easily you could become one of the statistics that you don't want to see on TV. How bored are now with where you're at? You may even possibly wish you were at home sitting through those commercials.

Still Waiting

Man I'm still in this Hell place. Yet I'm still waiting for a interview for a placement I know it's not CYA. So that gets some brick off my wall. But I still have a strike at only sixteen.

I questioned myself everyday asking myself "what the hell was I thinking when I did that?" I'm starting to realize a lot of things I done when I was younger and now I look at that shhh and be like "I did that dumb shhh back then." Now I look at it like all that shit was dumb and stupid. Basically I'm sayin that I'm growing up. But shhh I can't take nothing I did back. Only could ask forgiveness.

I'm tryna do get my shhh together because I have a CYA commitment and the judge told me if I commit any felony when I'm 18 then the strike I have now can double which could give me 25 with an L. So I really got to change.

I'm still waiting for my chance to get out and be somebody, and really to find out my purpose on this life. I hope I go to a group home that I can learn a lot from. I don't wanna stay another minute in this hell hole. So free me and my family, 'cause we all wanna make it and not fail because that's not what we here for.

-Lil' D

From The Beat: What was the reason for your behavior to bring you here? You've done the thinking, now give us some straight answers! What's the plan upon going home? How will you avoid the temptation/ traps?

A Letter To The New Me

Dear me;

You have been through so much and so much heart break. But all through the struggle you made it past. The old me wasn't terrible, just had non-attractive ways. But it's okay, the old you is gone and nothing can stand in your way now. The new you has many obstacles to still jump and climb. But once again, you will make it through.

Sincerely; to the new me.

-Shay

From The Beat: What were some of those non-attractive ways and how have you let them go? There are coping skills that we have used one way, that can actually be used to our benefit. What do you think some of those obstacles will be and how will you get over them? It may be in your best interest to formulate a plan, and a back up plan just in case. That way it will limit your surprises. They say, "adversity builds character," and we're sure you already have a lot of this. As you overcome those obstacles, you will only add to what you already possess.

Innocent Blood, Part 3

Daughter going through hard times
Seeing things that made her blind
All she know is to make fast money
Even if that means giving up the honey
Mom left her for dead
Now she has sick thoughts going through her head
She living life in the fast lane
Blamed it on daddy for not knowing his name
She been beatin', raped, and sexually abused
To live life right she really refused
She has the life of innocent blood
'Cause her father wanted to be a street thug
Now she lives the life of darkness and hurt
Got to get money so she lifts up her skirt
Now she going crazy and really pissed
In the bathroom naked with a slit wrist

-Lil' Mainy The Prince

From The Beat: That's a sad but deep poem and your chronicles of the street are always smooth and realistic. You have a tremendous talent to write with rhythm while keeping on track. Keep telling us your stories, but step it up a notch with poetry of life and hope!

A New Start

What's up Beat? Me nothing, just sitting here trying to be patient to leave to Boys Republic. This is my first group home but I've been to camp twice. Hopefully everything will go good for me at Boys Republic.

I got a lot of people been there and graduate and I heard it's cool. Well this is something new for me to experience. First time in an airplane also. I'm looking forward to leaving there with my high school diploma and learning a lot of new things too. This is my very last time in here so to staff soon I'll be y'all co-worker. I'm out.

-The fly kid Zuko

From The Beat: You've got some exciting plans. We wish you the best at Boys Republic. Keep your head up and stick with your goals.

It Could Have Been Me . . .

It could have been me . . .
Out in that street,
Raped, killed
Lying in a ditch
Man life is a trip
Out and in
About to run these streets
I wish they would let me be
Life in these streets
Is not what I want to be.

-Lil' Nazz

From The Beat: If it's not what you want for yourself, then what are some things you will need to do? Do you spend too much thinking about it, or do you put a plan in place since time is precious? Eventually some people get tired before it's too late and others don't. Which one will you be?

It Could Have Been Me . . .

It could have been me
But instead it was my friend
She choosed up with a guy
Who she did not know that well
He started off nicely
Then he ended up mean
He made her stay out all night
Until the police came out
Two weeks went by
And I finally saw her again
I asked her, "Are you still with him?"
And she said quickly, "Yeah"
I told her to come back home with me
And she silently said, "No"
So I jumped up in my dude's car
And said call me when you're ready
Another week went by, and I saw someone I knew
It was a girl I always see
I went up and asked her
Have you seen my ex-wifey
She told me she got stripped
Because she had left her ex-pimp.

-Cobbra

From The Beat: An obvious message from what you shared was making better decisions. Are there any other lessons in what you've shared, in case we missed something? We understand that at times we do what we must in order to survive and eat, so, do you think the consequences are that much greater if we're doing things that have a greater risk? And if so, is it then really worth it? We hope that you can take some real time to think and reflect on this! You said it yourself, "It could have been you..."

What's Up With That

Sitting in the hall
All I see is four walls
Crying every night
Man I wish I was out
Looking at the sunlight
My little sis 12 b-day on the 27th
And I am in here
I know she's wondering
When I'm going to be near
I'm sitting here with this fear
Wondering if there's going to be a scan
Let me get out the way
Oh got game
Spray with mace
All in the girl face
In the Oakland streets
Watching ninja's get beat
All because of money
What's up with that
I wish I could go back
Back to the days
Where people would just relax.
Will I ever reach my fact?

- Lil Mama

From The Beat: It must be hard experiencing everything you are currently going through. We all, at some point, wish we could go back in the day. However, we must accept our current realities and strive to move forward. Things that have passed can rarely be changed, but we can learn from them in order to improve our future! What would you take from back in the day and apply to this day and time? It sounds like you already know how to get out the way of something that isn't productive. Can you apply that same knowledge to other areas of your life? It may be very beneficial and assure you a better, less stress future!

My Tree Will Look Like...

My tree will look big and full of leaves. I have a lot of stuff planned for my future. One leaf will tell about the school that I went to (which is going to be an out of state college). I will go for four years. Two years will be Cosmetology. The other two years will be some kind of art class (so I can learn how to design clothes). When I do make it as a cosmetologist, I will have my own shop and everything else. That's where another leaf will come from. This one will tell about my job. Another will tell about my family that I will have: me, my husband and my kids.

-Cobbra

From The Beat: That sounds and will look like a very fruitful tree. And we're sure that there are other leaves that you haven't shared with us yet. For us that are in the early stages of planting our trees, what do you recommend we do and/or use to nourish and help our trees grow? Are there some things that we need to keep away from our newly planted trees, that may harm them in the long run? How do we deal with, or treat the bad leaves/ branches that may eventually stunt the growth of our tree? We would appreciate any tips you could give us on how to groom our tree, so that it may hopefully grow and be very full of life!

My Rage

I hate stupid people. I don't like it somebody always trying to lock a ninja up for no reason. I mean damn it's bad enough we got to be up in here at least ya'll can give a ninja the privilege to leave they room. And y'all always talking about how you know how it feels to be locked up behind doors. I feel you don't even know nothing because most of y'all never even been in handcuffs or incarcerated so how do you know how it feels to be locked up. I'm just saying you can't tell nobody how it feel to be locked up if you never been.

-Angry

From The Beat: That's true, it's almost impossible to fully understand something without experiencing it on some level, especially incarceration. Maybe one day you can be the one doing good and use the time you did as an inspiration to the youngsters that are locked up.

Life is like a gamble

Play your cards right
Don't let it scramble
Without a fight

I'm struggling in a zone
Stressing in my mind
Wishing I could be gone
And leave everything behind

Been caught up in the system
Trying to fight the case
And I'm still wishin' I can leave
This place...

-Saran

From The Beat: And once you leave, then what? What plans do you have so you never return?

My Plans

My plans for when I get out are to go to school. I want to stop doing what I have been doing because later on it can turn back on me and my family. It hasn't been easy for me in the past but I know others that have had it worse.

When I get out and start going back to school, I am going to get me another job because they probably have fired me from my last one. When I was free and would do stuff I didn't say I loved my parents. But now that I need them I realized that I do.

My experience in here so far has been coo' and has helped me to realized that no one will ever be with you all the way except for your family. So that's why when I get out I want to go to school, get a job, and spend time with family.

-Hector

From The Beat: You've got the idea Hector, and it sounds like you have the type of family support to be successful at whatever you'd like. Keep thinking that way and you'll be solid when you go home!

You Can't Let Everyone In

There is this girl I like a lot, but I don't want to show her my true feelings because I don't want to get hurt. But if you were in my shoes, you will see where I'm coming from.

This girl is so good to me. I think I love her, but then again. She say she love me,

so think I can let her in. But you can't let everyone in that say they love you.

But this girl is so cute and I sometimes like her personality. And when I don't

like it, I sit back and think and I wonder, "what the f am I doing?" Am I doing the right thing, or what?

Some day I want this girl to have my last name. But that's going to be a problem because a lot of girls want that. But yeah baby, if you reading this then you know who I'm talking about.

-Nu Nu

From The Beat: In these thoughts of yours is a lesson that can be applied to other areas of life. We can't deny and won't speak on your feelings, because only you know how you truly feel. However, sometimes everything that seems good for us, may not be so good after all. You touched on this yourself! Sometimes we think more of the good times, in order to get over the challenging times. That's good and can be used productively in other facets of life, or life in general. But the more we attempt to tune out the truth of the matter, sometimes is the harder reality sets in. Hasn't there been some things in your past that you initially thought were good, but turned out to be all bad? Choose your next move, in everything, carefully because there's no telling when we'll get back to that point in life!

School Bound

My plan for what I want to do, when I get out. I'm going to go to school and get good grades and try to stay out of trouble and not come back to the hall. The hall ain't no fun it's to teach you a lesson and not to want to come back. I'm gonna try and get a job so it's easier to stay out of trouble. So I'm not on the streets all day causing mayhem. Words of advice stay out of trouble and stay out of the halls.

-William

From The Beat: Sounds like you have the right idea. Maybe when you go home and turn your plans into actions your advice will hold the weight to help others change too.

I Would Not Even Lie

Being myself
If I had the chance to change my life
I would not even lie
But there is nothing in my life
That I would change at all
Because I think that the things I did in the past
Are the things that made me who I am today
There is one thing that I would change
That is how my actions are in the future
So that I don't have to
Sit in some body's Jail.

-Lil Dar-Dar

From The Beat: And who are you exactly today? At what exact point in your life are you at? You mention changing your actions in the future. How would go about changing your future actions? Being that the past has made you what you are, what are some productive/positive things that you can take from your past, and apply to your future? Do you believe that all this is possible, because we do? But it's not about us, it's about you believing in yourself!

A Poem For People Who Lack Love

I acknowledge the fact that I am way in-touch with myself now more than ever. I am at a peak in my life and my world, where I know who I am and what I am capable of? I know many people lack love and love and music is what's on my mind the most. Here's a poem for people who lack love:

It's seems you always push away
When the right people come along
And the folks you believe need to stay
Baby that's where you are wrong
Before you seek a love outside
Whether you choose to or not
Learn to know
Love the one inside
Then you'll know who's good
And who's not.

This may be corny, but the time I've placed in this letter was on recreation hour. Show a lot of love. I lacked love, until I found it was here all along. I don't know anyone from Eve, if you don't believe. I love all y'all. Believe me and know I have it for you any way – Honest – One day I'll sing and entertain my love to the world with my voice. I'll sing the truth.

- Gloria

From The Beat: Not corny at all! We believe what you say to be very true! We can only hope that you pursue your dreams and keep the right people close. More people need to hear your message, because a lot of times we do search for the right things in all the wrong places. Continue to share the truth with us all, because you never know who's reading and/or paying attention to what you're expressing. What enlightened you to start looking in the right places? We hope that you can continue to share some of your experiences/knowledge with us, so that we may see the real importance of our choices. Thank you!

What I'm Going To Do And Not Say!!!

Well me I'm going to get out when they let me out. I will have a long talk to my mother and make myself a daily routine. Make myself do what I need to do. The things that I will be doing is going to school, searching for a job and staying out of trouble. Spending more time with my mother and also going to church. Staying away from the trouble. People that will get me in trouble, or back in here. But my thing is making myself better than what I am now.

-Myesha

From The Beat: Do what you need to do then! It sounds like you know exactly what needs to be done and how to go about accomplishing them. Know this, there are people and programs out there that know what you are going through, have been there, or can assist you in where you need to be. Your family and church is a great support system and we hope you take full advantage of it! As you incorporate more productive things into your life, you'll see time management at it's finest and know exactly what you don't have time for in your life. Remember us when you get to where you're going, or even along the way if we can help in any way.

it really woke me up to smell the coffee and I really see jail isn't for me . . .

I Turned On the TV

I turned on the TV and I saw a war that should have not even started.

I see two faced politics. Say one thing on TV but when you look into their eyes is like staring at the devil. Immigrants wanting a better life yet they are being chased down and killed like game on hunting season.

We see this on TV for about 2 or 3 months then we get a whole hour on who is Ana Nicole Smith's baby's father.

Or what's the fashion, new shoes, gossip to cover up what really is happening. That's all about keeping peace where it is. The US wants to be seen as a calm, normal life country that doesn't have problems.

They keep it on the low not to be seen as a weak country. It's all media...

-Eric

From The Beat: Solid effort. We hear you when you speak about turning on the TV. OUR once wish is that when you write you write a bit clearer or have a facilitator go over your work with you so we don't screw up your piece.

Shoot First Talk Later

A million things on my mind and I so confused
Little kids on the block playin with no shoes
I got the police on my trail I don't know what to do
Bust back, talk later what you think I should do?
I'm a kid I'm not ready but I think I'm gon' die
I need help hurry up I got years in my eyes
I'm fallin now it's dark outline my body with chalk
I should of busted back but it's too later I just wanted to talk

-Lil' Chris

From The Beat: What were you doing with a gun in the first place? You don't carry a gun, you have a better chance of being alive. We hope you are smarter next go round.

Alameda County Juvenile Hall

Hello my name is Darrel I'm from Oakland California, and I really want to get out and start up my life because I know I made a mistake but I plan to do the right thing this time and go to school every day of the week. This is the first time I've been doing time in juvenile hall, and it really woke me up to smell the coffee and I really see jail isn't for me, or no one else want to either.

I really don't know about a tree yall talking bout but I did the best I could.

-Darrell

From The Beat: You did good, Darrell. The tree is you, and you are still growing and reaching for the sky. We hope that you will turn things around with school when you get back home.

New Me

Dear New Me;

I can see that you are sick, sick of coming back to jail. So what are you gone do to stay out? Are you gone stay at your group home? Are you gone stay away from people you don't need to be around? Are you gone stay off the streets? Or do you still wanna be the old me? Hell nah, never that.

-Tini

From The Beat: Those are good questions and sound like they can only help in keeping you out. What exactly will you do when those obstacles/ challenges show up? You share what you need to do, but not how you will do so. We're sure you have your plans, but it can only help to share those plans with the right person, in order to get needed feedback. This can only strengthen what you already have in mind.

NEW MEXICO

My Seed Of Life

I guess it is safe to say that the seed to my tree was planted along time ago. For as long as I can remember, things haven't changed. Growing up I seen gangs, drugs, and violence, so that's what I planted.

Now I am locked up, again, getting ready to do my second bid. I see things different; though it's a lil' too late. A lot of brothers go through this, is it destine to be. The root is too deep. Can I still turn back?

I guess my future and time will only tell. It's hard knowing I have to wake up tomorrow to the same jacked up life.

I have pain for my father, he died long ago. Mom was on dope, so my prides what I have and it's hard to swallow, from beginning to now, my life's full of sorrow.

-Mac Dre

From The Beat: It's good that you are seeing life different now, it may be your 2nd bid but know it's never too late for a fresh start. It doesn't have to be destined, break the cycle and start the change. Start the change with you. We are sorry about your father; it's always hard to loose someone you love very much. Don't follow the same path your mother is on; don't make the same choices she has made. Change your life of sorrow to a life of happiness.

If You Were Me!!!

If you were me you'd know how hard it is to be at the bottom.
You'd learn how to make a dollar out of fifty cents and make that dollar last a week.
You'd realize life isn't easy and when worse comes to worse
you gotta stay strong, life in a tough way.
But you'll always hold your head high with a smile.
Just as long as you're able to breathe and speak.
No matter how hard the struggle,
you'll see the best in things, because your not alone in this life. When you think you got it bad
you know someone else has it worse then you,
so you'll wish the best upon everyone!!!

-Lift'em

From The Beat: Lift'em you seem to be on the right track. Do just what you said, keep your head held high and know there are people out there that do have it worse off then we do. It's not easy to hit bottom, but now that it has happened lift yourself up and get back on top. Don't ever give up, be proud of who you are and reach the top.

Afro Pick

Brain dead
Am I spiritual?
Or do I got a heart made of coal?
In the streets, you'll never know
When it's yo' time to go
But, yet I carry my head high
Even though I bleed on the inside
And I don't cry, physically
It's just my brain leaks mentally
I am insane
'Cause these drugs
That the white man got us stuck on
And all these demons floating around
They can get you messed up
I am like a lost dog
That need to find his home
Lost in these streets
Roaming, trying to find a bone
I cry my heart out
When it rains on the Bart
That's why the Dark's out
My love for this poem brings passion
So check ya dress code
'Cause I just created fashion
Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side

From The Beat: Do you ever feel like you've been crying, and you have on the inside, but not outside, so anyone would know? That interior crying is a form of deep grief. We can tell from your poems that, even though you don't really write about what has happened to you in your young life, you've written hints.

To The People In The Halls

What it do with The Beat? It's yo' boy, J.T., up at the Ranch. Mean, this place cool. I only got eight more months left. Mean, this place ain't where y'all want to be. Tell y'all the truth, all we do is sit around and talk about what we go do when we get out. I hope some people get out an' do them. Don't let these people keep sendin' us around the world where some people can't get visits. But wherever y'all go, just do the time, and come home and make your family happy, but really make yourself happy that you did your program, and come home an' do your probation time, then you're done.

-Young Jt

From The Beat: You're very wise. You sound like you're dealing with your program, and will be getting out on time. Do you have any secrets or wisdoms that help you accommodate being down there?

Hospital Experience

Grim reaper lookin' over my grandma
In spirit I'm holding a gun
Ta-ta-ta-ta
Fighting the reaper for you
By yo' side, that's what I do
Sorry I'm not physically there
Right now I have a lot of fear
Wish I can give you flowers, balloons and teddy bears
Also I wish I could show you I care
Writing this shows I'm there
That I ain't the same ol' same ol'
Yo' guardian angel

-Chinatown Jr.

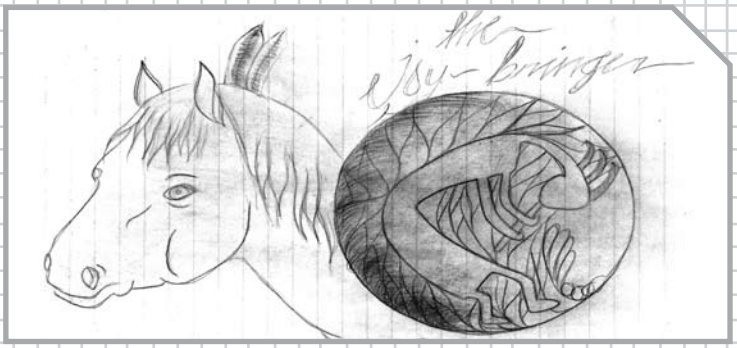
From The Beat: Beautiful poem for your grandmother. It's wonderful that you take care of her when you're on the outs. Who in your family is helping her while you're gone? Why don't you send your grandma this lovely poem about her?

Forever Tall

Death in my dreams
But I shall not scream
Because everything
Is not what it seems
I fight, 'cause I will never die
Forever I stand
Never I lie
Too much on my balance
So I shall not fall
Solid in the heart
If any at all
Street is trying to kill him
But, instead, I killed the streets
40 cal clappin'
So the streets fill my beat
My beat all base
So it hurts your ear
I'm Too Militant
And I hurt to fear
But I will prevail
In heaven or hell
I plan to make it
So I will not fail

-Too Militant

From The Beat: Do you mean that the streets are trying to kill you, but you killed the streets? What are you fighting about or for in the real streets, as well as in your dreams? How is your real life different from your life in your dreams?



If I Were You And You Were Me

If I were you and you were me
You would appreciate how it feels to be free
Once you get locked up and get out on the streets
And it is truly where you should be
You can't see how it feels to be me
If you were me, you can't take it

-Azen Boi

From The Beat: What is the lure of the streets for you? Why do you equate your freedom with being in the streets? Insofar as the drama of the streets can be as seductive as to be addictive, could you stay out of the streets?

Going to Log Cabin Ranch

The reason I'm going to the Ranch is because I denied the group homes that accepted me. I choose to go to the Ranch because I thought the group homes is not a good place to be in. So now I'm heading to the Ranch even though it's not the best place neither to be in.

-Oscar

From The Beat: We could use a lot more details than what you give us in this too short piece, Oscar. For example, why do you think group homes are not good places for you? Have you been in group homes before? What was your experience? What do you think the Ranch has to offer that group homes would not?

I Want A Baby

I always heard the saying babies havin' babies, but I don't I don't feel I'ma baby. I'm 17, but I feel like I'm grown. But one reason why I want a baby is because I want my baby to grow up different from what I did. I missed my child hood and I want a baby 'cause it might or it will change my life. But the moral of my story is I want a baby and I'ma get it.

-Mx

From The Beat: You're not going to like our response, but the fact that you end your piece the way you do ("I want a baby and I'ma get it") tells us that you are thinking only about yourself and what you want, and not about a new baby and what he or she needs. The first thing a baby needs is a parent at home to guide and protect it. You're not there. You're here. You may not be a baby yourself, but you're also not grown — as we're sure you'll agree in another ten years when you look back and read what you've written here.

The TV Show I Want To See

I turned on the TV and saw everybody that is from my 'hood shooting up everybody. No one tries to stop our drugs from coming in, and instead of other movies stars, there would be 'hood movie stars shooting up the police or something.

And I would love to se all my homies smoking a blunt with me in the other channel. Then in the other channel we would be poppin' pills in the thizzel channel chillin' with Mac Dre. And the first channel would be the peace channel with me my mom and my homies moms and dads.

-Alarcon

From The Beat: The problem we see with your TV show is that too many young people are trying to turn this fantasy into their reality, and that will never happen. Watching things like on TV is one thing, but taking them to the street is another. You're paying the price for that right now.

I Want To Go Home

First of all, I would like to thank the Man above for waking me up to write this paper. Amen.

I really want to go home because it's not fun in here. The reason why? 'Cause I don't want my little brother to be like me, that's why. It also why, because what happens if my family member died and you still locked up?

Being in here is like a different life, 'cause you got to see somebody going to the bathroom. Also, you eat nasty food and spoiled milk. I really want to go home.

-Chunky

From The Beat: We hope you do get to go home soon. But the time to think about your little brother is before you come here. Next time you're on the outs, whatever you want to do, think about whether you'd want your brother to see you doing it. If the answer is no, don't do it.

The Devil Makes Me Do It

There's always two people talking to me over my shoulders. There's the devil and there's the angel. The angel tells me to do good and tries to keep me out of trouble, but the devil tells me to do bad and gets me in trouble. I been listening to the devil for a long time. The devil has got me used to doing bad and doing criminal things that I don't even listen to the angel no more that's trying to keep me alive. But I got the devil controlling me right now.

-Enano

From The Beat: It's pretty convenient to be able to blame an outside force (the devil) for your own choices. If you're right that the devil is controlling you, then you're actually saying the devil is more powerful that God. Do you believe that? We believe that we all have the knowledge of right and wrong (anyone past the age of ten), and that we all make our own decisions. Take responsibility for yours.

T.I.P. TO Da Homies

All my homies tried to get out the game and look what happen. I'm sayin RIP to so many. I been thinking about getting out the game but I can't. It's a win or loose situation, die in the game or die tryin' to get out. You can't win so all y'all that read this peace remember you gone die by the gun.

I'm out. Peace Beat!

-Na Na

From The Beat: No, not everybody reading this will die by the gun. Some will grow up, open their eyes, see what lies in front of them, and make choices that lead them away from places like this and towards graduation and college and a decent life. You could make that choice, too.

My Birthday Is Coming UP

My birthday is coming up and I'm still here in the halls. I wish I was at my house with my homies, my pooh bear, and my mom. But instead, I'm in here, stuck in here with people I don't like. But it's cool, because when I get out, I'ma be at my house with my pooh bear, opening my presents (LOL) (lots of laughs.)

That's hella messed up, but I'ma have to live with being here for my birthday by myself — no homies, no homegirls. Damn, I miss my girl. I hope they let me call her for my birthday, at least that.

Well, that's all I gotta say. I'm out. Much love for the homies and homegirls doing time. Al rato.

-Grumpy

From The Beat: We hope the extra year adds an extra layer of maturity, so that you can act responsibly enough to stop doing the things that cause you to lose your freedom.

All In The Same Boat

This's different colors, units—blue, grey, yellow. What's the point of all these colors if we're all in the same boat? This joint don't feel like shhh. It's just you get tired of being here. For the first time it starts messing with yo' head, court twenty times, and still not getting out. And for your first time, you gotta go to a group home. What the hell? Now we all know they tryna get over. That's messed up.

-Danny

From The Beat: In a bigger way, we're all in the same boat on the outs too, but many people use colors to distinguish themselves from other people. We don't see anything in this piece that suggests you see your own responsibility for where you are. You put yourself in here. You can keep yourself out.

I Turned On The TV And I Saw...

When I turn on the TV, I see BET. The reason I see that is because that's the channel I watch the most when I'm watching my TV. Or, I see some boring-ass movies that I don't want to watch, so I turn to something that catches my attention and turn to that until I go off or I get tired of it. Or I turn it to the preview channel to see what's good on.

But when I turn on the TV, I always look for a good movie or some music. Them the only things on television that keep me interested on what on the screen. I really don't watch television no more because I just play my games on my TV, but when I do, I like programs with excitement. When there ain't no music videos, or some good movies, I settle with some old school cartoons.

-Baby T

From The Beat: What kind of movies do you like on TV? What games do you play? What's are some examples of "old school cartoons?" If you were creating your own TV show to watch, what would it look like?

What I Want To Be In The Future

What it do wit' da Beat? Man, what I want to be in the future is successful. I want to have a high school diploma. I want a good education, go to college, to make something of myself. I would like to have a good life. Love to have a fat dream house, a mansion, to have a car on rims, to have a wife wit' kids. Watch them grow up and be somethin'. Try to be a good role model.

-Gully Bub

From the Beat: We applaud all of the goals you have set for yourself, especially getting your high school diploma and continuing your education. But with such lofty goals, how did you find yourself caught up in this destructive system? How are you going to make sure you don't get caught up again?

If I Were You and You Were Me

I wish I was my mom and I wish she was me because she has a little time on earth. She got cancer and I have a fresh start at doing what I got to do. So I wish I was her and I wish she was me. Back then me and her didn't get along, but being in jail brang us together. Now we're best friends and God is takin' her slowly. My life got took three times and I'm still livin'. That's why I wish we switch spots.

-Hydro

From The Beat: We are so sorry to hear that your mom is suffering from cancer. But that is not a reason to trade places with her. She would not want you to go before her. In fact, the best gift you could give her is getting out of here and finding a way to stay out of here. Your mom needs you. It's time to sacrifice a few of the things you like doing, and stop allowing the system to take you from her.

My Kid Will Look Like Me

My kid will look like me and his mom. He will have a smart heart an not make bad choices, like their mom and dad, and grow up and be a smart basketball player and football player. He will have a lot of girls and he will not pimp them and he will have a great job. And he will not go to the juvenile hall. He is going to stay at home with me and his mom, for he cannot get a record, and stay good in school.

-Jacquar

From The Beat: Do you already have a kid on the way? If not, how do you know it will be a "he"? What if you have a daughter? What will change then?

The Beat

'Sup Beat? Well yeah, I need to get out of here! I'm tired of you guys always criticizing me about how little I write when I attend your pathetic ignorant time wasting program that the whole unit doesn't like coming to but yet we choose to come only because some of us don't want to be in our rooms, feel me

-Mark One

From The Beat: Let's see, you're the one that's locked up, but we're "pathetic, ignorant time wasters"? Hmmm. Oh, yeah, we feel you all right.

What I See On TV

What's up Beat? When I turn on the TV on the outs, I watch the news. I might watch videos (sometimes), but I mostly I watch the news to see who got shot or killed or just to see what's goin' on on the outs. I don't be in the house enough to watch TV, but if I do watch TV, it s go to be the news.

-Tha Dude

From The Beat: Do you get to watch the news when you're locked up? Do you miss it?

R.I.P.

Rest in Peace to the dead homies gone, bodies locked in a box
But I always see yo' face through the smoke of my chops
And every time I set my eyes on the block
I wonder why they did you like Pac when that big bun shot
You go always be the homie to me
When beef got too hard to handle I would throw you the heat
And vice-versa, cuddy, you might throw it to me
But when yo' pockets wasn't swollen I'd throw you some "Gs"
We had to get it how we live it, sometimes it was hard
But now yo' death has got me scratched up, emotionally scarred
Got cha obituary and a bottle, top of the shelf
I wish you was still here so I could show you the wealth

-Young Crest

From the Beat: What makes us so sad about this piece — and all the pieces we read week after week of young men killing young men — is that y'all believe that throwing that heat back and forth somehow protects you, when in fact, it puts your lives in further jeopardy. Do you think the way he lived was worth his death? Is it worth yours?

They're Playin' Me

S'up wit' chu, Beat? It's me, Grande, sayin' what's up! I ain't feelin' these topics, so I'ma write my own shhh.

Well, you know what it feels like when the court tell you one thing, then another. That shhh is messed up. I was talkin' to my Grandma today, and I found out I'm goin' to a group home. And I got made a fool of and now I'm hella heated. The first time the court told me I was goin' home. But I guess it just ain't gonna happen. So I just hope that all my homies and people locked up and don't get played by the court.

So, to all y'all locked up, stay cool and watch yo' back and don't let the court play you.

Pray and be cool! We all need God.

-Grande

From The Beat: If the court made a fool of you, it was you that gave them the power over your life to do it. You can complain about the system all you want, but the only sure way to beat it is not to let yourself be a part of it to begin with. The system won't change. Will you?

Trading Places With A Narco

If I could trade places with someone, I'd trade places with a narco. The reason I would trade places with them would be because I'd like to show them what me and my homeboys been through on a daily basis. I would want them to know how it feels like getting jacked, getting stopped every other block and getting arrested for stupid shhh. I think narcos are all crooked.

-Eight Ball

From The Beat: If you traded places with the narco, you might succeed in getting him to understand your life. But you might also find yourself understanding their life, too — and you might even have to change your opinion that they're all crooked.

Changing Places With My PO

If I were my PO and my PO were me, he would probably see some of the things I went through, and why I went down the wrong path. And if I were him, I can see why he make some of the choices he make, and why.

-Goofy

From The Beat: Two sentences doesn't begin to explain what you mean. Next time, we will want you to write more or it won't get published.

Me And My Lil' Bra

Man, what's up with The Beat? I'm up here in unit 6. I just started thinking about me and my lil' bra, and everything we been through. I mean, I love my lil' bra more than life itself. We been through it all, good and bad times. I mean we ready for whatever with each other. But I ain't gone get into detail about what we been through, but shout out to my lil' bra G-F, I love you bra. You always my blood.

-Hot-Rod

From The Beat: You say you love your lil' bro more than life itself, but apparently not enough to find a way not to be separated from him. Can you imagine you and him living life without breaking the law? If you can't, then you'll probably be writing a lot of sad pieces from behind walls expressing your love for the lil' bro you can't be with.

My Prevention Plan

My prevention plan so that this won't happen again.. The first thing that I have to work on is my attitude going into thing. The second thing I think I need to work on is hangin' around negative people and getting influenced so easily.

-Squeak

From The Beat: You have to become your own biggest influence. It takes courage to be able to say "no" to friends, even when you know that "no" is the right answer to give. We hope you add "go to school" to your list of things to do to prevent you coming back here.

Swapping With The Judge

If I could change shoes with someone, it would probably be the judge and let them see how it is to be a young black man In the ghetto, to see how it is not to always have a parent there for you to the point where you have to survive on your own. Then we gone see what's up.

-Ant-O

From The Beat: You're probably right that the judge would get a better idea of what you're faced with. But is it also possible that you would get a better idea of what the judge is faced with, and what kind of pressures he or she is under? Understanding people's lives is a two-way street.

Changing Places With My Dad

If I could change places with someone, it would be my dad because I would want to know what his life has been like and what he had been through. I would also want to know how it is in jail, and the mistakes he has made in his life so I can try not to make the same. I would also want to know how him and my mom relationship was like and how they met, and most importantly, how it feels to have kids and responsibilities needed and what it takes to have kids. And finally, I would want to learn what we have in common and what differences we have.

-Twon

From The Beat: We'd like to know more about your father and your relationship with him. Is he in prison? How much time have you been able to spend with him? What are your ideas right now on what it takes to raise children?

More Interesting TV

When I turn on the TV what I see are a bunch of shows that are all the same and are supposed to be funny. I would like to see more shows on TV that are more interesting and maybe with a little more action.

-Young Speedy

From The Beat: There's not much here for us to respond to. If you want to turn an ordinary piece into something much better, gives us examples of what you mean. What shows do you have in mind when you say they are all the same? What kind of show would be "more interesting" to you? If you were designing the most interesting show, what would it look like?

A Dream

I seen you walk and stare
I felt you come near
I closed my eyes and cried a tear
Pursed my lips then kissed you mid air
I thought you were there
A dream
As tender and serene
The boy is beautiful and wonderful I seen
I finally woke up and realized it was only a dream

-Rosevette

From The Beat: We hope you get out of here soon — and stay out of here always — so that this can be more than merely a dream!

Life Is A Risk

For me, I see life as a risk, especially when you living that crazy life. Every time I'm in a bad situation or about to get into something, I tell myself "Life is A risk." In other words, whatever happens happens. Like when my homies tell me, "'sup Os? Let's rush," I be like, "To hell with it! Life is a risk, homeboy!"

I don't regret nothing I've done or been through. If I had a chance to change something in my life, I wouldn't change nothing — same bandana, same 'hood, same love and respect, and same hatred, trust the same people.

Life is a risk. Live life to the fullest. Have fun. Do things that you can look back and say I did that.

-Oso

From The Beat: Didn't you leave some things out of your list of things you wouldn't change — cops, jails, POs, judges, lawyers, and handing your freedom over to a bunch of strangers! Add those predictable consequences to your list and tell us that you regret nothing! Of course life is a risk, but does that mean you cross the highway without looking in either direction?

The Hall

Never come here
Stay out of trouble
Do good for yourself
Don't let anyone bring you down or lead you wrong
You hear me?
'Cause this is not the place for real
They got nasty food
They strict
They do too much for nothing … give you room time and shih, feel You do not want to be and here
And I'm tryna tell ya

-Giggles

From The Beat: You're right. Being here is nothing to giggle about. So, how will you apply this excellent advice to yourself? What changes do you see in your future?

They Never Picked Up A Gun

Damn! If I only my young ninjas woulda had one more chance. Damn! Weez, Meez and the little homie Neez and big bra… wish they had another chance. They didn't do nothing to nobody. Some of them never picked up a gun. All they did was stay in the area of gun violence, so they was a threat to other people. But they gone now and not coming back.

Love y'all and I'm out.

-Illy

From The Beat: This terrible violence has permanent consequences for so many people — not just those who have paid with their lives, but all those left behind to bear the pain. Are you doing anything to take yourself out of this "game" or do you contribute to the violence and to someone else's pain?

My Tree Will Look Like....

If I was to plant seeds, I will start off on a bad route so that I could learn from my mistake so that I also could make a better decision later on in life. And when I get a little foundation, I will go out and help the homeless so that I'll have some good karma. It will come back and God will give you many blessing.

The End.

-Fred B

From The Beat: You have already planted some of those seeds — some good and some bad. Now it's time to water the tree that is growing from the good seeds and put pesticide on the tree that is growing from the bad.

My Leafy Tree...

If I were to make a tree based on my life, there would be a lot of different types of leaves. Like on one part of my tree, I would have buds that grow money because part of my life is the money chase. Another part of my tree would be leaves in the shape of a heart because I got love for my family.

-Young Meel

From The Beat: Wouldn't it be nice if money did grow on trees! But, unfortunately, in order to get that money you want, you have to start planting seeds that grow strong. Going to school is a very good way to begin planting those seeds.

The lizard is lazy

It looks like Dark Side
When Dark Side found it
It was covered with ants
It's lazy; it's scared to eat a spider
'Cause it came out of the wild

-Michael

From The Beat: Sounds like torture. Do you see any similarities between all of you being forced to stay at the Ranch and the chameleon being trapped in a glass jar? Maybe it's time to set it free.

Life

My world is crashing
Emotionally hurting
Pain is unbearable
Wonder if my heart is fixable
Family messed up since I was small
This place is the worst— only weekly phone calls
Life at it is getting worse
I don't know when I'm going to burst
Life--what a lemon head
I wonder if there's a higher power
Well, I ain't dead
I can't tell if there is
System plays you 'til you get pissed
Thinking to myself
Someone close is in bad health
Can't see her
Wish I was a kid; life was smooth as fur
Where I didn't know a single thing
Sitting on mom's lap
Playing with her earrings
Life...

-Captain Kangaroo

From The Beat: In some ways you're right, life was simpler when we were all young. But even on your mom's lap, weren't you eager to grow at least a little bigger, so you could walk, run, make faces, entertain everyone, throw a ball, like kids just a little older than you could? Maybe it would make life easier to manage if there is a higher power. So far you've hung on without losing your temper or your mind, and messing up your program. Whatever gives you strength, go with it.

If I Were You and You Were Me

I would be more lenient about people life because if you knew what I been through then you would know that I livin' life in what best for me. You would have a whole different mindset. I would have certain people get another chance if I know they ain't on no bullshhh.

But don't judge me on no other shhh somebody else did. Like for instance my PO told me it might be a bad chance of me going home to my dad because somebody went home to pops then shot somebody eight days after movin' to pops. That ain't got nothing to do with me, so why I face consequences for someone else reactions? But yeah, you know who I'm talking 'bout. You the judge!

Stay positive keep your head

-D-M

From The Beat: We can understand why you'd be frustrated to have your PO make judgments about you based on what someone else did. But if you were able to trade places with your PO, do you think you might have a deeper understanding of the PO's actions if you had to deal with the consequences of his or her decisions?

Dead Time

What's up with The Beat? This be Little Vago. I'm still up in here just doin' dead time. I been here for two months now, still fighting my case. I'm in unit 6 now, but I came from unit 7.

Trying to go home, that's the only thing on my mind right now. But if I'm not, I'm do time the best I know how.

-Lil' Vago

From The Beat: If you're not using this time to think about changes you need to make in your life (if you want to avoid consequences like this), then it really is dead time. But if you're thinking about your life, making plans for a future that includes school (and not the hall), and educating yourself, then this is time well spent.

Yesterday, Today An' Tomorrow

I wish I had a remote for my life, for reals, because right now I would press "fast forward," or better yet, I'll just skip to da next chapter. But at the same time, I would press "rewind," go back a couple of chapters. Go back, press "pause," even press "instant replay." It's cool, though. We all gonna get out eventually, because yesterday, today was tomorrow, but tomorrow, today will be yesterday.

-Birdman

From The Beat: What part of your life would you like to live again? How will your future be different, when you're free again, than it was before you came down to the Ranch? If you could "fast forward right" now, how would you envision a future that's free of any mess, that will be creative and productive?

They So Cold They Like Winter Mint

The system sets you up for failure
Once you get caught up, no one will save ya
Don' let them know you' ignorant
They so cold they like winter mint
Play you out every chance they get
The system takes every person and makes a bet
How much money them can make off you?
Grievances don't work, they just a fluke
Do everything they can to get you spooked
Make you eat fake ass meat and fruit
They can give a damn 'bout you
Make you senseless; I don't know what to do

-Lil' Hedge Hog

From The Beat: Do you really think that no one in the system really tries to help you? Do you think that you're really on your own down there?

Love

Love can being you happiness
Or it can bring sadness
My heart is completely shattered
It been very bad, sir
I'm just finding that special one
Feelin' emotionally—pain isn't fun
Each day I feel like dying
So I could be flying
Towards God
Can take away the pain
Please spread your arms
Like father and son
Protecting him from harm
I can't deal with the pain
Rather get killed in the game
Can I really find that special one
To be my honey bun?
Love…
Either pain, or live happily ever after
Love…

-Captain Kangaroo

From The Beat: There's no pain as profound as when someone you loves leaves you. We hope you trust life enough to know that you can truly enjoy it whether you're in love or not.

My Life

If I were you and you were me, maybe you'll see how it is to live as a thug. You'll see how it is to walk in my Air Forces, because the life that I live is not worth living for. If you're someone else living like me, it's not caring about anybody' feelings but my wife's, my family and my homies.

But if I were you, your life would be very passionate, loving and caring about everybody's feelings, but then, again, you're not me, so what's the point of comparing each other's lives? My life was took control of by the evil one's hands. He's holding me in his hands an' won't let me go, because I'm an example of what a devil should be like, while, on the other hand, your life is probably the opposite, but if you was me an' I was you, it will still be the same, because I'll turn your life into hell. If I had a chance to be anyone else, I'll turn they life into a thug life, because that's the only way to live is thuggin' it out. So if I were you and you were me, we'll be the some.

-Young Jeff

From The Beat: In one place you describe your life as not worth living, and then you also depict it as a thug life that is hell. Do you mean that your life is hell because the evil one took it over? Why can't you extend your heart to more people? What would it take for you to maneuver your life into one that helps you be happy? What would a beautiful life be like for you?

Back From The Street…

When I was out, my life was in my hands. So every time I came out the house, I got shot at or had to shoot at somebody. I hate to be locked up, but sometimes I am happy, 'cause I could have been died or shot up a lot of times. But I still hate being locked up, even if it saved my life, 'cause my homies need me right now.

-Marko

From The Beat: The story you write, that you feel you are threatened with being killed every time you leave your door, is how many writers describe their lives. Your story is so sad and tragic. You may be right, that being out of your neighborhood is keeping you alive. Some of your friends who had been in juvy with you were shot not long after they left, so what you write is real. What would it take for you to live a life that is safe, once you're back home?

That Day

Once you're a criminal, you be treated as an animal
Armed guard playin' you, counselors, too
You tell a lie, they believe you when pigs fly
You tell the truth, might as well show your proof
They don't believe you either way, being incarcerated gay
Wanting to get some, doing your business, wondering if anyone comes
Wishing that day comes, they play you 'til you're all numb
Waking up, wishing yo' name won't be called
Can't talk back or fight at all
Do that, you catch 30; sitting on a toilet that's dirty
Smelling urine and doo doo when sleeping, hearing lil' kids weeping
Just waiting… 'til that day is coming…
Lose a week, pass a week; counselors don't know what they seek
Still get paid, taking a leak; they don't care if you lose a week
Someone piss us off, we bust; that house you own from us
You should let us go home on time; you still getting paid in those dimes
Waiting 'til that day…

-Captain Kangaroo

From The Beat: Your writing is getting so much more solid. This is a very good depiction of what your life is presently like. Remember, the counselors' main lesson for all of you is that you don't want to mess up again and have to do another program down at the Ranch, so if your lives down there are in some ways raw and funky, at least they're not the streets. Are you learning from your experience?

I Live A Life That You Never Gonna See

I live a life that you never gonna see
I live a life full of drugs and violence
A life where bustin' guns
Is a means to survive
I live a life full of danger and fear
Where you' constantly
Looking over your back
Trying not to get caught
Slippin'
I live a life dat chu never gonna see
This Smokey up at LCR
Just stoppin' by to say
"Stay up!"
Al rato

-Smokey

From The Beat: Why are you living a life that no one's ever going to see? Why is it full of drugs, violence, bustin' guns, danger and fear? You sound like you're content with it, even proud of it, but it also seems like it bothers you that your life is always being threatened.

Love R. Kelly

Every time I turn on the TV I want to see R. Kelly. He is a really good performer. I love every performance he does. Even though he went through some legal things, his performances are always grand. R. Kelly's music everyone loves and knows at least two of his songs. He go so hard. I think we don't see enough of R. Kelly on TV. Not only his love making songs are good, I have crossed the stage to his music, and so has many of my friends.

-Tish Tosh

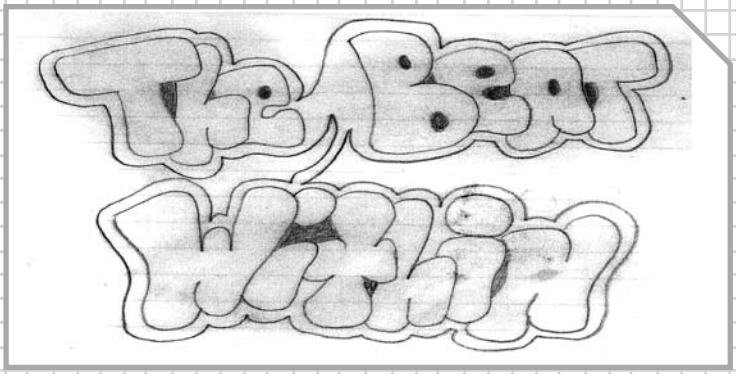
From The Beat: What's your favorite R. Kelly song? What about it do you like the most?

What I Need

I am 17 years old, almost 18. I have been locked up for six weeks now. My lady is two months pregnant. I still have 27 more days left in this place. I don't know what I'm going to do. I know one thing and that is I'm going to be there for my kid. I think god blessed me with a child so I can change my ways. Right now I have been clean off drugs for six weeks so when I get out I need to keep it up. I don't want my kid to end up in this place, or worse. I also need to get a job and get back into school so I can have a better job and support my family.

-Jesse

From The Beat: We're glad that you're looking ahead, trying to plan for your new family. We encourage you to ask for help, to seek help. Your first job is to address your addiction problems. When you have that under control, you can work on everything else. But you have to be healthy to help others. We wish you well and admire your intentions. Now turn them into reality.



Dying To OD

If I were someone rich and they were me, they'd be a chignon and I'd be high on drugs practically every hour on the hour that passes by. I'd have all the bomb, coke, pills I can get a hand on, overdose go to the best hospital and get out. On second though I'd have my own doctor and just live the life.

-No Name (And No Sense)

From The Beat: Since you didn't sign this sill piece, we gave you the name we think this piece deserves... What you're saying is that you wish you were rich so that you could be a bum.

TV

I don't watch TV. It stresses me out because I don't learn anything productive, and I get negative insights on myths and tales. Best way to learn is through education.

-Anti-TV

From The Beat: We're with you. We know that occasionally, there's genuinely good stuff on TV, educational stuff, too. But sorting through all the garbage takes way too much time. Better to read a book.

Soldier

I want to enlist and go to war.

If I die in war at least my family can say I took something up an stood by it.

I want to be the best possible soldier, to see if my leadership can become stronger.

To trust my life with others as well as others relying on my to watch my side.

Lock an load I'm ready to go.

-Blizz

From The Beat: What is it about war that attracts you? Is there other ways to show your family your leadership and your ability to stand by a cause?

My Tree

My tree was fine well grown an beautiful. Well taken care of and watered every day. Then my grandfather died and my tree turned ugly. I didn't care about anything I felt that it wasn't his time and I was angry at everything. I felt blamed. I wanted everybody to feel my pain. My tree died shortly before getting locked up but I didn't care I was bitter.

I was doin' shhh without thinkin'. If I didn't get caught up when I did, I probably would have been doing more time than what I'm doing. But maybe getting locked up was what I needed. I get thinkin' it wasn't my fault.

There was nothing I could do about my grandfather passing and nobody's blaming me. But when it comes to my tree I guess it's time to rebuild start from scratch.

Time to regrow my tree.

-Cherry Bomb, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Great piece of writing. You honestly reflect on your past and come to terms that the death of your grandpa was not your fault. Why did you think that?

Words To All

My fellow inmates - its your Estrella India dropping some linas. Well today's topics I'm not feeling very good. These days just keeping my head level and my shoulders square.

Well, they're trying to send me back to the ranch. I don't think that's gonna happen, but we'll see.

The system ain't no joke these days. They're sending everyone to different places, especially the ranch and YA, which is messed up because half of us don't even deserve it.

I just want to tell those who are looking at hard time, to stay up. No matter what, you can make something out of yourself - no matter where or who you are. To all, be coo' and love, honor and respect to all who know me.

-India

From The Beat: India, how does one go about the difficult job of making "something out of yourself"? How, for instance, will you go about it? It's OK to write off topic, but when you do, educate us, please.

If I Were.....

If you were I you would have mixed feelings.
Some parts you will hate.
You will have a loving family that really cares for you.
You will act mature and sometimes be the clown.
The worst thing is all the heartache.
All the things I do hurt
my family, and I didn't notice until I got locked up.
I've been in and out five times and hopefully that is it.
I'm trying to change, really trying;
I decided to change a lot of things in my life.
If you were I you would have had a lot of fun.
All the partying, girls, drugs, and money
(I ain't talking about a couple hundred),
I know I don't have it that bad.
I'm only going to do about six months or something.
But sometimes I wish I were in other people's shoes.
To let everyone know you should just ride by yourself.
That's all you got, you and family.

-Avalani

From The Beat: You've got everything straight except one thing Avalani. It's good that you've decided to change things and changing isn't easy, but if you really want it you can't just "try" to change. Only YOU control our own actions, especially if you're serious about riding by yourself and with your family. Keep that mentality up and hopefully you won't have to just hope this will be your last time in anymore.

If You Were In My Shoes...

If you would take a walk in my shoes you would know how I feel and would understand my life better. If I was in your shoes, I would know what you're going through, through pain and happy all these years and would understand each other better.

All I gotta say about my life is that it's always heading up hill, then down hill and keeps on repeating like that. Always wondering to myself when's that "live happily ever after" is ever going to come. Just hoping that one day it will come and come soon because it's making me go crazy. A'ight then, everyone keep all your heads up.

-Trau G

From The Beat: We don't know anyone whose life is "happy ever after." But we do know people who have found ways to make their lives much happier by not putting either their lives, health or freedom at risk. Wouldn't that make you a happier person?

If I Were You and You Were Me

Well Beat, it's your girl Green Eyes. Well, let me just say: What's uppers, Beat.

If you were me and I were you, you would be calling me 24/7 and I would be out and about and you would want to pick problems with me and I would just say I don't want to deal with your shhh right now. So you would hang-up on me and cry and I'll be on my way to you and to say I'm sorry and you would say we're meant for each other.

-Green Eyes

From The Beat: We like how you flip this topic to make it into a little scene between you and your boo. Very creative!

I Turn The TV On, I See

What's up Beat? It's dat uso from the max. Well, I am gonna write about what I see on TV. You guys know me as Siaki aka Nestola...

Well, what I see on TV is da news 'cause when I wake up in the morning and the staff pop my door to do our hygiene, then dat's da only time we can see and watch TV. Well this morning when I came out the news was on. It was talking about banning plastic bags and cigarettes from people. They said some shhh about kids trying to kill theirselves and about cigarettes killing other people while they smoke in public. Dat is what I see and watch on TV for like five mins. when I come out of my room.

-Giant Samoa

From The Beat: What about when you're not locked up, what do you like to watch on TV then? Is there anything about the news that you find interesting?

If I Were You And You Were Me

If I were you, I think I would live like a normal man. There wouldn't be so much violence. An I would be dressing different. My money would come the right way by working. I would be very educated and have a good mind set in life. I would have lots of good goals. I would have a good hobby instead of drinking and smoking, like building cars or playing baseball or something. I would also learn that me and you go through the same daily struggles. And also have our own personal problems with family and ourselves, friends.

-Same Struggles

From The Beat: Again, we wish you had put your name to your writing! What is keeping you from pursuing "lots of good goals" or substituting good habits for bad ones? Clearly, you have the brains for it, so what's holding you back?

I Turned On the TV and I Saw...

When I watch TV or flip through the channels, I see the war going on and hearing about people dying a lot. And I wait to see the truth about the war and see it end. When I watch TV or flip through the channels I see movies like the Sopranos.

-Ricardo

From The Beat: Are you talking about the war in Iraq or the war on the streets? In both cases, we hope you get your wish to see it end.

I Turned On The TV

When I turn on my TV I see nothing but a lot of people lying about how they got products that make your hair grow back. And commercials try to sell you something. When I turn on the TV I wish I could see more educational stuff. And more documentaries about what really happen in the 'hood. Because it isn't always bad. There's good being done in the 'hood too, not just violence.

-Good In The 'Hood

From The Beat: We really wish you had not forgotten to put your name on this excellent piece. And we wish you'd given us a few more details. For example, what kind of educational shows would you like to see. Can you write about some oof the good things being done in the 'hood?

Wanting My Brother To Change

Hey what's crackin' Beat? Well it's this homeboy Troubles from the streets of Gilroy once again.

If I were able to change places with someone it would be with my brother. I know my brother is older than me but I don't think he would want to be like me going to YA. But I would change places with him so he can see how he will end up if he doesn't change what he's doing. I don't mean change I just mean stop getting caught for stupid little reasons. But that's all I got so till next time to all stay up.

-Trouble

From The Beat: We wish you had included more details in this piece. Is your brother free or locked up? Is he doing things that you think will lead him to places like this? It's hard to give someone advice about staying free when you've handed your freedom over to the system...

Surrounded By Clowns

What's up wit' it Beat? This is Lonely up in Santa Clara County juvenile hall. Peace up to the homeboys doin' time wherever you're at... Hold it down where I can't. Today I wanna address all you ninjas on that fake shhh:.

I look around an' see these clones an' clowns,
Who talk a lot when they rollin' round,
But ain't holdin' shhh down.
I know they're not what they pretend to be,
And ain't any better than my enemy.
Putting on a front, answerin' questions I didn't ask,
Like I can't see behind the mask.
So many words but no actions,
I hate these perpetrata's with a passion.
They're actin' hard while I'm laughin',
'Cause I know that's all they're doin'- is actin'.
It don't mean you tough 'cause you're in jail,
It just means you got caught for an assault or tryin' to make a sale.
So don't try to convince me you're what you aren't, 'cause you'll fail.

-Lonely Boy

From The Beat: Since we only have your description of "them" but not their description of you, we can't judge how true your assessment is. But one thing we know for sure: If you don't like your surroundings and the people that are in them, then stop putting yourself here.

A Good Friend

What's up and cracking Beat? Well, as for this lonely girl – not much – just trying to put up in here another day. I thank God that I woke up today. Well, today I'm gonna write about how much I care for my friend.

A couple of months ago I met this guy that always gave me good advice. I never thought that I would meet someone so cool like him. Me and "Mr. Silent" became so close at this point that we both shared personal things. We always spent time chilling and doing what not.

I was on house arrest and he was on after-care. Once we both got off our programs, we became little smoking and drinking buddies. We would be drunk and just ride around looking for trouble. My favorite drink was, of course, Corona but since I was with Mr. Silent a lot I started to like Mickey's. Every time I drink Mickey's it reminds me of him and all the crazy shhh we used to go through.

I learned a lot from you Silent, good and bad things, but it don't matter if you're butt hurt at me. I know where you at and all I gotta say is that I got you friend, when I'm in the outs. I'll shoot you a couple of lines and I know that you know what I mean by that. Keep your head up high and stay real strong. I hope that you forgive me for all the stupid shhh that I once told you. Our friendship dropped, pero since we're good friends it will go back up. We will then begin our shark hat collection again. Hahaha! Hope to see you real soon! I'll be out of this place on the 9th and expect some lines.

Well I'm gonna cut this short and until pencil meets paper again with much love and respect, always your homegirl.

-Lizeth

From The Beat: It sounds like your friendship with Mr. Silent went through a lot of ups and downs. People often say that it is difficult for members of the opposite sex to be friends, but we think men and women can be really good friends to each other. We hope you and Mr. Silent work it all out.

If You Only Knew

If you only knew how it is to be me,
If you only knew how it is to not be free,
If you only knew it sucks to be me.

-Rascal

From The Beat: Only you can know what it is to be you/Just as only we can know ourselves, and that's true/But if the life you chose gives you pain/Then maybe it's time for you to retrain/Joy can come after sorrow/ So plan for a better tomorrow

Expressing My Feelings

I hate this place! It's a waste of time and life. If you say you hate this place, then why do you return? I remember when it was my first time in here, back in the beginning of 2004. I have been away from my family and don't remember how it is to live in society as a normal human being. Having to walk down the streets not worrying about the cops. Well, I can't blame anyone but me for my mistakes.

But, anyways, I don't know why I'm writing this. I guess I just had to express my feelings.

-Jsr

From The Beat: We appreciate you expressing your feelings, because that's the main point to our program. However, we ask you what you have asked others, "why do you return?" You're right because we all make mistakes. But you have all the power when it comes down to it. We hope that through you expressing yourself, you can hear the feedback and formulate plans of action to take, in order to become that normal human being once again. Thank you for listening and expressing yourself.

Changing Places With My Brother

Q-vole Beat? It's that one mas chingon Travieso coming from the max unit. Today I'm going to write about if I was someone and that someone was me. Well I would want to be my brother and my brother be me so I could see what kind of life he is living, always on his toes 24/7 and fighting every day to stay as solid as they come. To feel what he feels for the past five years of his life. I know he wouldn't mind to be me 'cause he's the one that made me. Everything I'm doing right now he's already mastered.

(To be continued...)

-Travieso

From The Beat: To want to trade places with the brother that made you is not much of a stretch, Travieso. You need a little more courage to take a bigger leap than this. How about trading places with someone whose life you know nothing about? Now that would truly be a learning experience.

To My Love

Juvenile hall walls may be between us,
Juvenile hall walls may keep us apart,
But each letter I receive, Darling,
Brings you closer to my heart.
Love, there's no need to worry,
There's no reason to fear,
When I offered you my heart,
I placed it in your care.
You know what we have is rare,
And I will always care.
Te Amo

-Creeper

From The Beat: It's hard to face this sad fact, Creeper, but you put those walls between you and her by choosing something that was more important to you at the time than she was. Next time you're together, you'd better give serious thought to how to stay together.

If I Was You...

Hey, q-vole (what's up) Beat? Well first of all, I don't think you want to be in my shoes. But if I was you, I would change my life around and make something of my life. I would never be here in the first place and I would be someone different. That's what would happen if I was you.

-No Name

From The Beat: That's good advice that you're giving, but we wonder are you capable of taking your same advice? If you were in the other person's shoes, what would you change and how? How would you make your life different? And why do you say you wouldn't be there in the first place? We're interested to hear your response and hope that we can all get a response from you.

Never Coming Back

This is the last time my pencil touches paper to The Beat Within. I've been in this juvenile hall facility for about two months and already my time is up. I'm gong to get released tomorrow. I started off in one unit, but after I got sentenced they sent me to another unit, then where I am now. And I can't wait till tomorrow. Today I had my last lunch, dinner and activity here. Every minute that goes by I get happier and happier.

Well, I'm out and never coming back to this place.

-Freedom

From The Beat: By the time this comes out you will be out, but this piece and response is for everyone still incarcerated. We've seen and read this type of piece many times before, and then some. We hope that you all stay out once you all get out. We know that this is how all of you feel. However, where is the planning on things to do different once back out? As they say, "doing the same things will get the same results." Staying out of those types of places takes more than thinking. It takes action and we can only hope that some of you have come to realize this. Good luck to all!

Number One Love

Babe, I miss you. Why you have to leave? I thought we were meant to be. I can't bear this pain. I don't know why I hurt so much. I feel helpless without you. I don't know what to say. I'm speechless.

Why baby, why I have to be suffering? I can't believe we ended. I thought it was gonna be a new beginning, but I thought wrong. As I sit in my cell I feel lonely and I feel cold. My heart is burning.

Why baby, why? If you move on, I guess I have to move on too, but you will never be forgotten my love, my chinita, my chunk monkey, my giggles. Love,

-Crazy

From The Beat: Love takes us to the top then casts us down into the depths. We're sorry you're experiencing what most of us past a certain age have also experienced. You will always have a special place in your heart for her, but as you fall for other people (and you will), this terrible pain will begin to fade away.

I can't believe we ended. I thought it was gonna be a new beginning, but I thought wrong. As I sit in my cell I feel lonely and I feel cold. My heart is burning.

If I Were You and You Were Me

I would like to be my dad for a minute and see what he has in mind. I've been trying to do everything he asks me to and I have always done the opposite, I always let him down.

But this time I'm here for a serious crime and I'm just hoping to do the minimum time because my dad is getting old and I don't want to spend most of my time here incarcerated. So if I knew what he had in mind, I would love to do it for him the best I could. That's what I would do if I could be him for a minute.

-Sorpresas

From The Beat: It seems like you've already violated what he had in mind, because we're sure he didn't have you coming to jail in mind. We suggest that whenever you do get out of here, you think carefully of the things you do that lead you to lock-up, because that can only hurt your father. You owe him more.

I Left You Alone

What's up Beat? Well, I'm not feeling the topics so I'll write something else. Sitting in this max unit thinking to myself, "Damn! I'm looking at some time." Sitting in my cell wondering how did I get here. So many days and night going down the drain.

I've spent lonely nights without your love. I hate not being out there with you and my kids. But damn, this is the life I chose running the streets with no remorse, doing my dirt and not thinking.

Look at me now. Every day I look in the mirror I see a lonely vato with no feelings just trying to make it in this game. Well that's it P-Love.

-Rascal

From The Beat: Yes, Rascal, you made the choice to leave your love behind, to leave your kids behind, to leave your freedom behind. We'd love for you to think seriously about those kids, and write us a piece about what you think you owe them, and how (or if) you can deliver.

Today

Today I'm going to write about me. I'm going to write about how I ended up in juvenile hall and how I regret doing what I did. When I was young I did stupid things and made wrong decisions that got me locked up.

A few months ago I was serving my EMP time for an old crime. After being on house arrest I thought I was going to do good. I had been going out, chilling with friends, and using drugs. I was sentenced to 90 days of house arrest.

After being on the monitor for 20 days, I cut it off, because I wanted to stay out for my birthday and for Cambodian New Year. A warrant went out for my arrest and after two months, I turned myself in because I did not want things to get worse.

Now I'm back here and I regret what I did. I miss being with my family and friends. All I can do is wait for my release date. In here, I can't do shhh. Juvenile Hall ain't fun at all. It's just a waste of time in my life.. I'd rather be at home with my family, seeing everyone smile and be happy. I have about a month left.

-A

From The Beat: Why will it be better when you're out? What will you do differently? What makes you confident that you'll change your behavior? Tell us next time.

Why I Do What I Do

If I were you and you were me you would understand why I gang bang. Mostly, I do it for all my dead homies RIP and those foo's that always trying to shoot me or the ones that stabbed me I just don't do it for a color. I do it because I got so much hate against the other gang. So don't think we do shhh just for fun because in the streets we roll an eye for an eye. RIP homies. Ride 'till the end.

-T

From The Beat: Is this the real reason why you do what you do? How did you get into the lifestyle? Is there a way out? Of course, just need to have the courage to move on! Why live a life incarcerated! For what?

Switch Places

If I was you and you were me you wouldn't be able to walk a mile in my shoes,
On the grind tryna make some quick dough you'll be struggling I bet
you will have the blues,
Watching your back and worried about somebody running up
while you living good with a sliver spoon in your mouth,
You got all the finer things in life
while I'm struggling tryna put a fresh pair of shoes on my feel
what's that about,
You get good educations while I get torn up books
look I try to do good but nobody won't help so I'd rather hit the streets,
Hustle forget the world I got to put some money in my pocket and support my family,
As I walk through them dark streets, in all black wit' tears rolling down my eyes,
You're having good eats wit' your families and having nothing but joy
I need a blessin',
I want to live the better life too,
So let's just switch places for good.

-S

From The Beat: You don't need to switch places, you simply need to make new choices, better choices, do it! Use your experience to better your life. Teach the readers that this isn't the way.

Getting Out Soon

I'm getting out soon and I know the first thing I'll want to do is go buy a sack and a couple of blunts and kick back. And I'll be off probation so there won't be anything holding me back but myself. There's the problem – me! Hopefully I'll have enough self control to stay away from substances, and even cigarettes. They're kind of a waste of money, don't you think? I think my new drug of choice is gonna be higher education, or female companionship.

-Frank

From The Beat: We'll vote for higher education. The rest will come in its own time.

If I were you

If I were you, I wouldn't be starving.
Farms made from poverty,
The government are steadily harvesting.
If I were you, I wouldn't spend my days in a box,
Thinking about all the things I don't got.
If I were you, I wouldn't be filling your shoes,
That's why I am here repaying all of my dues!
If I were you, I would be free,
But that's just it, I can't be you — I can only be me.
To tell you the truth, if I weren't me, I wouldn't know what to do.
That's why I don't say if I were you.

-Giovanni

From The Beat: If you were us, you'd know what we do/And then you'd be able to do it, too/The same as if we had your life/We'd be struggling to escape the strife/But we're not you and you're not us/Just something to think about without much fuss

I Turned On The TV And I Saw

When I turn on the TV I see a lot of things. Sometimes I say damn, how can people invent such things and how smart human being really are. But what I would like to see is more reality on TV, as in documentaries about the Juvenile and Adult Systems and how it really is inside prison walls. To show how harsh they are to prisoners and their daily lives.

To me turning on the TV, I expect to see and learn new things. Not fake things such as movies.

-Chueco

From The Beat: Those are interesting things that you want to see. Actually, there's a show on MSNBC called Lock Up that does just that. Do you think that sometimes we think that others are responsible for change, when it may actually be ourselves who's responsible? Truly more light can be shined on some of the gray areas that the majority may not know about, but why would I as an individual want to put myself in those gray areas. Wouldn't it be cool if you got out of that predicament and then made your own show/s about what you wished was shown on TV? That way you could tell the story with first hand knowledge. Just something to think about!

Future Tree

My tree's roots were made of mistakes, through jail and prison my "father: ruined he beginning of my tree's growth. Not to blame him I made my own decisions which fell into my own mistakes.

I thank God for letting my tree still be alive and still having time to change. I am lookin' at time when I leave here. But I have faith that everything will change. New seeds will be planted and new roots grow. Starting with education and work something to keep my mind bust and me off the streets. That's the plan to have my tree grow in the future.

-Rjs

From The Beat: Excellent plan. Education is key! What do you want to study?

The Cops Play Dirty

I think nowadays cops play dirty. The system is corrupt. It ain't about who's innocent or guilty as long as they see someone do time.

I was wrongly accused of something I didn't do. I would've been doing ranch, but now I'm lookin' at CYA or maybe prison. I think that it's obvious that I'm innocent, but the cops want to mess around and take me to court.

They couldn't even take me away legally they rushed into my house with a SWAT team without a warrant. I asked to see a warrant they told me "don't worry we did our homework we got the warrant at the station."

When they took me to the PD they never showed me the warrant. I think that's hella wack, they couldn't legally take me so they had to play dirty and go in my house and look through my shhh and cuff me and my parents.

It's alright, because now I have something to use against them in court. I think that eventually I'll win my case in court it's just the waiting for court behind a cell is a bitch. My case is going to take at least a year and a half to settle. I think everyone here agrees with me when I say screw the system.

-Xnotoriousviet

From The Beat: Well if this is the case, then you have a strong case. We hope you have a good attorney who will represent you and put on record these concerns. We encourage you to work with your attorney too, there's plenty at stake.

I Turned On The TV And I Saw.....

When I turned on the TV, I saw a very violent movie. It was called "Scarface". It was a very good movie. It was about the biggest drug lord in Cuba, who came to the USA. He was making a lot of money and living it to the fullest. He had women, bodyguards, and lots of money. It really got me pumped up, made me want to do it, too.

-Martin

From The Beat: Hey, what if you turned on the TV and watched that movie called "Good Guy". You know, the one about the fellow who was very kind to everyone, even people who had done him wrong. He was always helping people. Just about everyone liked him, and he was happy, most of the time. But at times, when he'd think about how sad the world often is, he'd cry a bit. And then he'd go out into the world and try to make it a better place. Do you think, after watching "Good Guy", that you'd want to be like him?

Education First!

How is everyone doing in this kitty hellhole? But besides that I got a couple of things to get off of my chest.

I am just sick of these people that don't know what's up. This is a very hard time for me in juvi hall because I want to take off on people everyday but it's not worth it. So I am trying to better myself and get educated because with out your education your life is heading nowhere, and it's pretty embarrassing when you can't help your kid with her homework.

What I'm trying to say homeboys and home girls is: take your education serious first.

At this period of time I would like to thank Jesus Christ for blessing me and helping my time go by with out getting in anything serious. So Jesus all I ask for is that I bless and guide the other kids in the right direction in the name of Jesus Christ...AMEN

-Merino

From The Beat: We know you've been through some rough times. We also know you're trying hard to put your life in order. We remember a time, not very long ago, when we couldn't say that. Your desire to change is obvious to anyone who takes the time to look. You know how some people tell you to take a deep breath when things get tough. It's really true. Next time you feel like "taking off" on someone, take a deep breath, instead. And then take another one, and another one. Soon, the feeling will pass, and you can get back to more important business.

My Dad... Police, Lies and Money

Them ninjas took my brother
And the rules didn't apply
They took my big cousin
I couldn't help but cry
But, when my pops
Schlepped that white dude
They sent him to prison
And all of a sudden
$2000 came up missin'
He tried to take him to court
But they threatened him with time
So he laid low
And was solitarily confined
Three years to do
And a kid that was new
He also got caught with drugs
They charged him with that, too
My dad was a hustler
Who always had it made
Brought up in Oakland
And knew the rules of the trade
An international playa
And beezies knew his name
Comin' up
My pops had to be hard
Eight years old
Runnin' from cop cars
Though from two different worlds
Me and my pops just alike
Say the wrong thing
And we ready to fight!
I love you, Pops
Keep yo' head up
Doing yo' time
And get out!

-Jordan

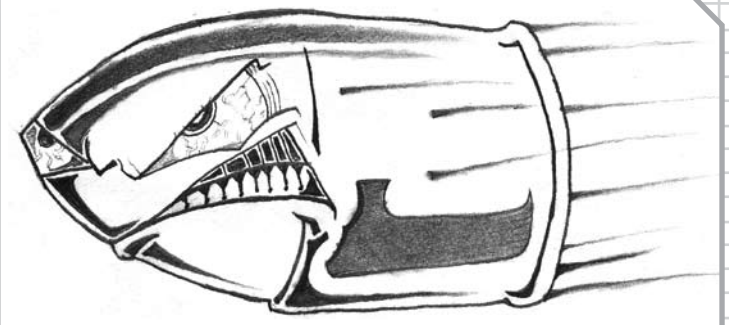
From the Beat: Doesn't your father want you to learn from what's happened to him, and for you to keep yourself out of trouble? It doesn't help him or anyone if you mess up and end up in YA or state prison, too. You're bright, talented, insightful and very thoughtful. Can you take your skills and work them into a life that will keep you out of any mess?

The Struggle

Whenever I hear about bloodshed
I think a warrior is lost
A cousin, a brother
It's a heavy burden
And a pricy cost
When my brother got shot
Nobody but my family gave a damn
Just let him sit and die
Like he was a lamb
We called the ambulance
But couldn't mess with the police
We seen too many people
Get rough in the streets
I remember once
The police beat a ninja
'Cause he wouldn't talk
They beat him down bad
Left him with a broken jaw
They wonder why we rebel
Government asking
"Well, what is the 'struggle'?"
It's the thing keepin' ninjas in trouble!
Give a job
Then maybe I can stop it
A paycheck every week
Wit' a few birds in pocket...
The 'struggle':
The modern depression of hustlas

-St-Rugis

From The Beat: It's a tragedy that your brother died.You have our hearts. You're right, that getting yourself a job is a great way to take control of your life, get some money, and some education so you can help your family and community stand up to the authorities and demand they represent you fairly.



My Freedom

I am a young Latin fighting for my freedom, but now I'm looking down to my window, thinking about when am I gonna get outta here, and I hear that they gonna give me 25 years. I pray to God to give me my freedom and forgive me.

-Young Latino

From The Beat: How are you doing up in juvy? You must have a whole lot on your mind, on your soul.

My People Is My People

My people is different. My people, they got attitude. My people, they're dressing different. They dress in black Dickies, and also they dress with white tee shirts.

I see my people dying for colors. I see my people end up in jail every time, and it pisses me off, make me mad. Also, I see my people being with their families. I see my people being in the streets, making money, and my people, it is like the bird flying in the air, but sometimes they always go down. My people are my people.

-Dony

From The Beat: It must break your heart to see your family mess up, go to jail and die for their colors, Dony. You totally have our sympathy. But what about you? You don't want to follow them that way. What does your family teach you that's positive, educational, wise, that will keep you out of trouble and out of juvy, free and alive?

I Miss My Family And They Miss Me

What's up within The Beat?
Being in juvy ain't the place to be at
It's bunk showerin' wit' other dudes
The food's gross, early bedtime is messed up
My boys are here wit' me, but it ain't fun
I miss being on the outs
I miss my moms, bra and sis, but they miss me, too
Every time my moms visit me, I feel happy
But w'en she leaves, 'cause visiting is over
I feel hurt in the inside
'Cause I can't leave wit' her

-Marvin

From The Beat: How does your being up in juvy affect your family, Marvin? How are they managing without you? Do they worry about you? When you're home, how do you help them out? Who is taking up the slack for them, now that you're gone?

Money Gives You Choices

Money could buy happiness, but not all the time. Money could get you things you want and places you want. When you don't have money, you have few choices on what you want to do. When you have money, your choices are more up and open, like 24 Fitness. Money to me is a value, but a bigger value that I have more than money is my family and friends. Money is a piece of paper that everybody wants.

-David

From The Beat: You've really thought through what money can mean to people—as something that can liberate them and expand their lives, and/or cripple them in becoming totally concerned with getting it. How do you earn the cash you have? You seem to have a very reasonable attitude toward money.

Never Trust Nobody

Hey, what's up? This is Kasper, writing about something called friends. They call themselves your friends, they say that they got your back until the end…but never believe them when they say that BS, 'cause I'm a tell you a little short story.

Okay, so on the outs there is this one dude that calls himself my homie, but I've been locked up for a minute and he used to like my girl. So now that I'm locked up, he been trying to get with my girl and he asked her out and tried to kiss her. So I got heated and I called him up and he don't even wanna answer his phone. So all I'm trying to say is never just trust anybody when they say that they got your back, 'cause the truth is that they just gonna backstab you, 'cause me and this dude went way back to the seventh grade and he just gonna try to get wit' my girl when I'm locked up… That's some crazy shhh. Never trust nobody, 'cause all I got is me and my girl, and I don't even know about her.

-Kasper

From The Beat: Don't you have to ask yourself--weren't you taking chances with your relationship with this girl by doing whatever, losing your freedom, getting arrested and going to juvy? Good luck!

I'm Out The Game

Man, my life ain't never goin' be the same
Hang my hat on the wall, 'cause I'm out the game
Get out the fast lane; gotta slow it down
Get the beat to my new life flowin' now
This is a trauma experience in my years livin'
Fear the Lord all the way, but I'm afraid of prison
Do what I gotta do, so I cannot get hit wit' numbers
Life in jail, I can't see it, like I'm Stevie Wonder

-Davone

From The Beat: Well, you know your future is almost entirely up to you. If you're truly out the game, what do you plan to replace it with? What do you foresee as being your greatest challenge on the outs? What in life beyond the game excites you, that you can get into?

My People Are Strong

My people are strong
They went through everything
Today they're in major league sports
In America
They sailed miles to get here
Wipes and cotton fields are in your vine
If you're black, you feel my pain
But just imagine
This is everything, man

-Alfaro

From The Beat: You're right to be proud of them. What about your accomplishments and pain?

Lies

Lies will trick you
Make you think somethin' is true
Lies will make you double-cross yo' friend
Lies will kill a relationship
Meant to be 'til the end
Lies can take away breath
And put a ninja to rest
I've seen lies twist and turn
I've seen lies make houses burn
But me be no liar
Me try to keep it solid
So stay up, my people
And keep gaining knowledge

-J-Mak

From the Beat: Nice poem. Who has lied to you? Can you give The Beat some true examples of the troubles lies have created, for you personally or that you know about?

I Don't Know How To Change

It's not like being locked up
Is all I know to do
I know what I need to do
And when to do it
It's just the stupid choices
I've been making
Have been getting me in trouble
This is my second time in here
The first time I didn't like it
But I didn't learn my lesson
This time I hope I learned my lesson
I wanna change
The thing is
I don't know how
Last time I was here
It was six days
And I was put on probation
I was so ignorant
I don't have much freedom
But it's my fault
I made my choices
And hopefully
When I get out
I'll make better ones

-Chubs

From the Beat: Can you examine what is the biggest lure that's calling you on the outs, that you find hard to resist? Is it money? The drama of the streets? Your rep? Your homies? What can you do to invest your energy, your passions, your time, your future into something legal that really interests, compels you

PIECES • OF • THE • WEEK

Switching Places With My Mother

If I could change places with anyone, it would have to be my mother. People may say that I know my mom too well to be saying that I wish I could switch places with her, but the honest truth is that we don't know each other well at all. We do live in the same house, but very seldom talk to each other. I know her favorite color is green and she knows that my favorite animal is elephants, but we live in totally different worlds.

If I were to change places with my mom, I think it would be beneficial to the both of us. I would learn and understand what had happened in her childhood and teen years, to have the affect on how she acts today. And she would learn what goes on in my life, that she is completely unaware of. And then she would actually understand why her daughter is in the dark when it comes to having or trying to have a conversation.

If it were to happen that we were to switch lives, then after a period of time, we would come to understand one another and therefore eventually become not only closer in a mother/daughter relationship, but also become friends.

My mom would come to understand the decisions that were made by me. Even though they were not the greatest decisions, they were sometimes made by her actions towards me. And as for me, I would learn to understand why she has said the things she said, even though those things should never be said to anyone. I would be able to forgive her, because I would understand what was going through her head when she did say them hurtful things.

-Alisha

From The Beat: To us, this wonderful piece reads like a prayer. We want to say: "Amen," at the end. We wish everybody could take the time to try to see through the eyes and experience of others, as you have done here with your mother, while hoping that she can do the same in reverse. We hope you and your mother find a way truly to communicate so that each of you can get to know the other better, and to better understand why you love each other.

Weeds In My Garden

My parents planted eight seeds and that's me and my brothers and sisters. We all got different views of the garden and the garden is life, and we all look different. I'm the middle seed, and to me, it seem that I have the baddest view, because there is weeds around me. The weeds is my friends, my enemies, the block and what's going on in the block.

My sisters and brothers are growing, because they are getting watered by my mom and dad. The water is the advice and the teaching that my parents do. They take it and they tie it to their hearts. But me, I'm the shortest out of them all. They try to feed me, but the weeds drink it. It's like my parents teach me to get on the right track, but my friends and my enemies pull me out to the wrong track that got me here.

-Sipu

From The Beat: This is well written and speaks to the topic very well, Sipu. But really, the definition of a weed is only something not wanted in your garden. Flowers can flourish in the middle of weed patches. So, in the end, it's your responsibility to grow strong and beautiful, even if that growth is made more difficult by your surroundings. If you aren't getting the nurturing (watering) you need from others, then find it yourself through books, school and decent people.

Maybe We Wouldn't Hate Each Other

If I were you and you were me
Maybe we wouldn't hate each other
You would be able to see
Where my hatred comes from
And I would see where yours comes from
Maybe I would understand why you hate me
Maybe we could relate to so many things

-Veronica

From The Beat: When you can imagine being another person, with all the teaching and conditioning that person got, then you begin to see where all of our hates come from, an example of thinking for yourself. And once you're thinking for yourself, a time comes for all of us to start questioning those ancient hates and start making our own decisions. This is a very deep piece.

When I Turn On The TV

When I grab the remote
And flick on the TV
What do I see?
I see my best friend fighting in Iraq
For our country
I see people killing
It's insane; it's anarchy
1 flip the channel
And what do I see?
I see those cartoons
That make more sense
If you're stoned and smoking
I continue to flip through channels
Skipping QVC
Only to watch the infomercials
To see what they're trying to sell me
I flip and flip
Occasionally stopping at Spike, ESPN, and MTV
I finally decide to watch a movie on AMC

-Skater Girls, San Mateo

From The Beat: We like the feel that this poem conveys of you actually flipping through the channels. What kind of movies to do you like watching on AMC?

Sorry, Mom

Raised off no father figure
My mother was my father
Me, my sister and my brother
Really never lived with hunger
Even on them rainy nights
She would always keep us covered
But look at how I pay her
I talk back and wander around the crazy streets
Tryna show off like I'm thunder
Now I'm chillin' in da buildin'
And I'm feeling like
Now I'm wearing county's clothes
Nothing but yellow
On the back, "San Mateo County"
Now I try to blame her
For not telling my PO
To let me go
I'm sorry, Mom
It wasn't your fault

-Rogelio

From The Beat: We hope that your recognition of what you owe your mom is more than just words on a page. You're right, she has sacrificed a lot for you. She's been both your mom and your dad. You may never be able to pay her back for all that she's done for you, but at the very least, you should not be making her life harder.

PIECE • OF • THE • WEEK

A Vision Of Myself

If you were me and I was you
It be a different story
I would be in glory
Da days wouldn't be as hard
The pain an' sorrow would be gone
I will be sitting all alone
In da dark, asking God, "Oh, why?"
I mean
Do you honestly think you have it as bad?
Let be bring you into my world
Try to understand
I stand loud an' proud
I love myself, I sure do
But even if I choose
Not to cry an' complain
Yeah, I'm in pain
I blame a woman when I was nine
Had to take care of my fam bam dat couldn't
Or wouldn't
Addicted to the crack pipe
Ever since I was born
My brother was the only man
I would respect
He made me reflect
While dad was giving me drugs to sell
I can truly say
There's only one loyal male
But, yes, dis is my tale
Gangbanging, drug selling is all I know
An' now is the time to come up
With something new
I been raped, molested
All of da above
An even more
My own family
Yes, my heart they tore
I bet you had no idea
An' you still don't
You will never
'Cause all da dirt an' shhh
I regret an' been through
You will never know
But maybe you understand
I been in da game
For da past nine years
An', yeah, I don't have no fears
All I have is salty tears
Dat don't even come down no more
Because now, as I look back
Yes, it's crazy
I was nine an' had to pack
Sell sacks on da block
Had my gun on lock
Not yet fifteen
Had done time
Sipped on Bacardi lime
An' had already an attempted murder case
But dis shhh I face
On da daily
But, yes, mainly I'm a family woman
But was raised to hate men
I never had a chance
To kick back an' play with dolls
At nine. I served my first year
Looking at four walls
But, yeah, I can't complain
I just maintain
An' gain
'Cause, yes, I been in love
And had my heart broken
But today, I have a man
Dat I want to spend
Da rest of my life with
'Cause, after all dis da only female I love in dis whole world
Is my mom, grandma
But last but not least
I love my cousin wicked
'Cause she da vision of me
But ever since
I been taking care of her
I love her an' I will never leave you, boo

-Giggles

From The Beat: This is what we're talking about, Giggles. You managed to write about your life without sounding like a commercial for your gang. You've been through a lot, and nobody should have to go through all that. But now's the time to prepare yourself for future changes so that what you go through in the future is progress and success and not the pain you've been living with. School is the key.

WEEKLY • WRITINGS

Stronger And Alive

If you were in my shoes, you had too many choices to choose. You would have to say yes, because you had no choice, and if you said no, there would be consequences. They always hurt me in many ways. But, me, I can't say, 'cause I hurt too, in many ways.

Now things get worse. I can't seem to change. I still want to kick it. I still want to smoke. I still want to fly high, like my homie, Smoke. I can't seem to change—it's too hard for me. Is it because of what I've done? To me, it's just too late. I can't believe that it won't be the same.

Mommy tells me every day, why I'm the way I am. She tells me, "Where's the money coming from?" I tell her, "Please, just take it," and, again, I'm out there, where I am a really different person than in my home. So don't think just because you did what you did that day to me, you're going to put me down. It just made me a different person—stronger and alive.

-Smiles

From The Beat: Of course, we can't know who you are addressing or what it was that person did to you. But we can say that when you write "it's just too late," we read that as nothing more than an excuse to keep doing what you're doing. Of course it's not too late. We know many people far deeper into their own grime than you, still able to get past it. If you make the choice to keep flying high, then you've also made the choice to keep having your freedom stolen. Your choice.

My Brother's So Close, Yet So Far

It's bad knowing I have a brother in here
After all he has done for me
After all those talks about staying out of trouble
I feel like I betrayed him
Every day I see him
Breakfast, lunch and dinner
It feels bad
Knowing he's so close
Yet so far
I hold my tears
So he won't know
What I'm going through
But I know deep inside
He feels the same way, too
Sorry, Bro, for making you feel
The way you do

-Karen

From The Beat: By allowing yourself to come in here, it's not your brother you betrayed but yourself... just as he has betrayed himself by allowing his freedom to be taken. Work on your own issues so that when you do get out, you won't be doing the things that lead to your separation.

Brick By Brick

For years I was in prison. I spent a great deal of time away from my daughter. I came home to learn an important lesson about balancing life and family, about what kids really need from a dad and about the building and dismantling of walls. Shortly before my daughter third birthday, we were driving through our neighborhood on the way back from the grocery store when from her car seat in the back she said, "Dad what street is your house on?"

"What?" I thought I hadn't heard correctly. "What street is your house on?" It was a telling moment although she knew I was her dad and she knew her mom and I were in a relationship, she did not know I lived in the same house that she did.

Secret Hide-Out

Though I was able to convince her that we resided at the same address, her uncertainty about my place in her life continued and manifested itself in many ways. A skinned knee sent her toppling toward mom, not me. A question raised by something overheard at school would be saved for hours until mom was around to ask. I realized that not only did I have to spend more time with her, I also had to spend it differently. The more I sensed her distance from me, the more goal-oriented things I tried to do with her. Like going to the swimming pool or to the movies. If she and I didn't have some specifically scheduled activity, I would typically go play basketball.

For maximizing time and being productive, it made perfect sense. When it was time to read a bedtime story, my baby mom would call me after the rest of the pre-sleep routine had been completed, and I would walk into her room like a dentist who waited until the patient was prepped so he wouldn't have to waste a minute's time. It was the way I felt, and I'm sure now it was the way it made her feel too. A turning point came one evening. She was growing increasingly frustrated trying to build a "secret hide-out" in the backyard. The sun was setting, and she should have been winding down for bed, except that the then slate tiles she tried to prop against one another kept falling over. She'd been at it for days sometimes with a neighboring friend, sometimes on her own. When the walls fell for the last time, cracking as they did, she burst into tears.

"You know what you need to make this work," I said.

"What?"

"You need about 60 bricks."

"Yeah, but we don't have 60 bricks."

"But we could get them."

"Where?"

Last week, in issue 12.27, this next writer amazed us with his very deep and introspective thoughts. But just when we thought we couldn't be more pleased with someone's expression of great ideas, he goes on and does it again this week. He gives us close to ten pieces this week (they're the second half to last week's installment) and each of them are worth reading. He delves deep into his soul and extracts very wise emotions. We were grinning from ear to ear after reading, "Brick By Brick," where he uses that phrase beautifully. He talks about the barrier that was placed between him and his daughter due to his absence while being incarcerated. He ends up getting out wanting to break down the barrier, "brick by brick," while building her a secret hide out, "brick by brick," the metaphor is brilliant. Then he goes on to talk about many things we've all probably mulled over at one point in our lives. However, the way he does it is blissful with his very deep-rooted observations. Whether he's writing about how dreadful it is for one to take another's life, or how even elephants' growth is hindered by being held captive, you can tell that this man has given his thoughts a whole lot of thought. We are grateful to have such writers as this next one published in The Beat. We have a feeling he's creating something as we speak and we already can't wait to see what he's come up with. He's writing from Florida State Prison in Raiford, Florida, and we want you to read on because we guarantee you'll learn something from him. (Or your money back.)

"The hardware store. Get in the car."

We drove the three or four miles to the hardware store and found the bricks. I started to lead them, a few at a time, onto a big, flat cart. They were rough and heavy, and I realized that I had my work cut out for me. After being loaded onto the cart, they would need to be unleashed into the car, and then unloaded yet again at the house.

"Oh please, let me do that, Dad, please!" She begged. If I let her, we'd be there forever. She would have to use two hands just to pick up one of them. I glanced at my watch and tried to keep my impatience in check.

"But boo, they're very heavy."

"Please dad, I really want to," she begged again, moving quickly to the pile of bricks and hoisting one with both hands. She lugged it over to the cart and laid it next to the handful I'd placed there. This was going to take all night. She walked back to the pile and carefully selected another brick. She took her time making her choice. Then I realized she wanted it to take all night. It was rare for the two of us to have time like this alone together. She wanted this moment to last. I leaned back against one of the wood pallets she, working steadily at the bricks, relaxed and became chatty, talking to me about what she'd build, and about her friends. And it dawned on me: here we were buying bricks to make a wall, but in truth we were actually dismantling a wall, brick by brick the wall that had threatened to divide me from my daughter. Since then I've learned she doesn't want me for what I can give her, for where I can take her, or even for what we can do together. She wants me for me.

This Is Who I Am

My blood line consist of riders, fighters, and survivors
Indomitable individuals with incredible potential
Yet many of them have fallen and many have risen
Many have died yet are still living
I too have fallen and I too will rise like many along the line
For I have a pedigree of success
And my hunger, my hunger is too strong I refuse to lay down and die!
Even though I too have died yet I'm still living
I too have been saved yet I'm still sinning
I have very few complaints for I chose the roads I walked upon
Yet I was a thug by circumstance and not by choice
For I felt the coldness of the night within my pores
And the pain of hunger within my soul
I made the wrong decisions and I was labeled a thug
But I say it's incredible a thug can be so intellectual
A psychological phenomenal
And some, some say it's a miracle
But I say I'm simply impeccable
Not an average individual
And of harm I am invincible and extremely unpredictable
For I've master fortitude and I've conquered temperance
For you can just look within my eyes and see the potential of a genius
One of very few men who thinks with his mind and not his penis
But every time I expose just a portion of myself
People think I've lost my mind
And some simply say I've done too much time
Some have even said I must be an alien; I don't belong on this planet
But I say I'm a revolutionist born in the wrong era!

Foods For Thought

He who seeks truth, and is determined to uncover and master the secrets of the universe for himself, is treading a path beset with many pitfalls, danger and illusions. The weakest points in his character, the tiniest chinks in his armor, will be cunningly and subtly attacked.

Honesty and sincerity are the keys that will enable him to reach and to recognize truth; plain honesty about himself, his purpose and other people.

Seekers of the truth are side-tracked mainly by two things: a love of sensationalism and laziness (not studying). Both of which undermine their honesty. You must know that sensationalism (emotional excitement) is to the mind what sexual overindulgence is to the body. Even religious emotion can be a type of mental sensuality, and therefore unbalancing.

The capacity to understand truth is the greatest attribute which the mind can cultivate. The mind must be trained (through discipline) just like a muscle, to cope with certain ideas and perceptions, and this very training enlarges and expands the capacity to understand still more. After a period of such training and discipline one can explain to an intelligent person something which he would have been quite incapable of visualizing at the beginning of it.

The first effort of the seeker, then must be to avoid laziness (lack of study) and to love honesty and discipline. When once we are attuned to this ideal we will be able to distinguish a wise and good person from one who is not, thereby avoiding a number of disillusions and pitfalls.

The truly wise person, usually passes unnoticed among all those who are not seeking the same purity of motive, the same vibration as his own. He is sometimes very cleverly made to look like he has undue problems or weakness by those who are fakers themselves or who really don't understand.

Past, Present, And Future

When the cell is quiet and I can hear my own heart beat, as I lay motionless, thanking him (God) for seeing another day. Going over my past, facing my present and hoping for a brighter and better future. Thinking over and over, will I be able to function, mentally and physically when I get out. Hoping that I'll find that someone to make my life complete with a woman I hope to love and that she will be faithful and loyal, while blessing me with more kids, to make me happy.

As I think about that one, the other or both, of the females that I gave my heart to, images of our bodies in action, makes my body tingle and itch, for what was once passion, love and excitement. But as I fight for control over my body, I switch the image to my two kids and niece. As I think about all the birthdays, holidays, and open houses that I have missed and going to miss, I feel hot tears rolling down my face. And I beg and pray silently, that I get a chance to be with them again. Because I'm afraid that they will forget and hate me since I'm not there in their lives, to protect and be with them, like I said I always would.

As the pain starts to subside and my tears come to an end, I breathe slow and deep to bring myself back in control of my emotions. As a voice tells me, "Men aren't supposed to cry. It's a sign of weakness." So I get up, wash my face and rinse my mouth out. I remind myself that men who don't cry after leaving something behind, that he misses and loves, is not a man. And with that, I lay back down with a smile on my face, going back over the past, present and forming a future.

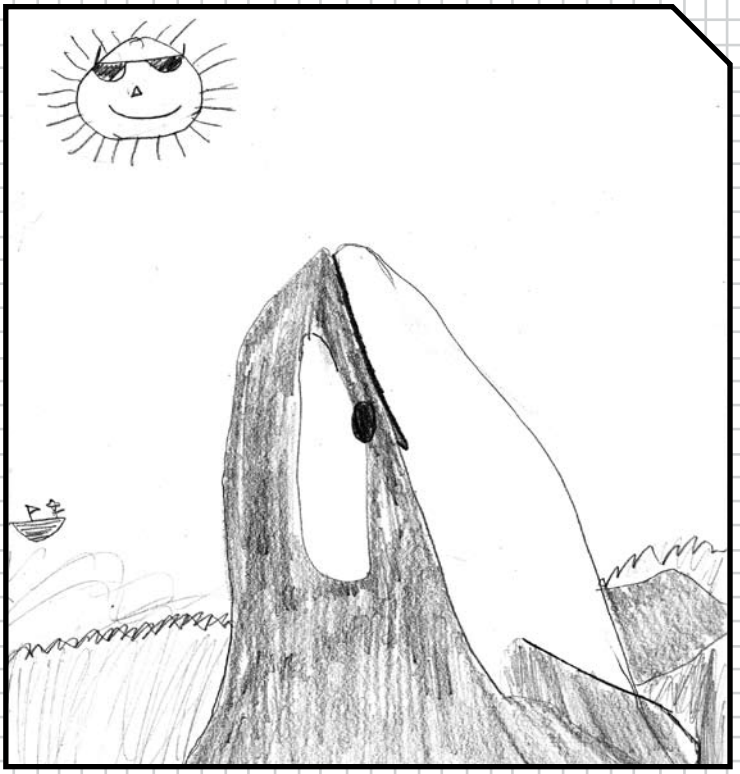
Life In A Cage

Thousands of years of natural selection have provided us with domestic animals used to living alongside and accepting training from humans. This is not the case with wild animals. In circuses animals do not perform to please their masters. Most have been brutalized and perform out of fear and because their food, water, and rest have been withheld. Just look at the tools of the trade: whips, chains, bull-hooks. Animals exhibiting such behavior are either killed or severely punished. The cruelty doesn't stop there. When traveling from place to place, these magnificent, wild creatures are chained or confined to cages in small, dirty railroad cars or trucks, often unheated or un cooled, for up to 300 days a year.

Young and old elephants love to swim and they enjoy bathing in mud. They are so socially entwined that they bury their dead, protect each other and aid in giving birth. In the circus their natural life is denied them and their extremely high intelligence is frustrated by a life of isolation and monotony. When not performing they are routinely shackled, sometimes by all four legs, deprived of food and water, beaten with whips until their spirits are broken, after which they'll allow someone to sit on their heads or submit to waltzing on their hind legs.

When these large animals aren't confined in small cages, they're obtained to their pedestals. Ropes are put around their necks to choke them into learning tricks. Bears may have teeth and claws removed and are forced to perform unnatural acts. Tigers leap through hoops of fire to avoid being punished should they fail to please their masters. When not in the ring, circus animals are forced to exist in cages, barely big enough to stand, lie down or turn around. Imprisoned in cages, animals develop repetitive and even self-destructive behaviors. Life in a cage is a parallel to the historic treatment of men in prison.

To be continued.



The Miseducation Of Life

I heard something last week that really unnerved me. I was telling a young man how I was looking forward to my birthday, and I told him how old I'd be. He looked me directly in the eyes and said he didn't expect to live nearly that long.

The young man is not experiencing any health issues. It's the lifestyle of his peers and associates that causes him to make this forecast.

This thinking prevails among our young men, and that's the reason they appear to not care about anyone or anything. They actually don't expect to reach their middle 30's and they're doing everything they can to make sure they don't.

For some reason, these young men feel they have nothing to live for or look forward to. They are trying to live life as fast as they can, and it doesn't matter how many fatherless children they leave behind.

Where did this hopelessness come from? First let's look inside the home, the parents of some of these young men don't give them hope. They encourage them to be deviates and encourage them to do whatever it takes to keep the cash flowing. The parents know their sons are armed with weapons, and know they will hurt someone.

The second place is the school system. After they've exhausted the system, including alternative schools, they accept the notion they aren't wanted anywhere. Hopelessness locks in, and they do what they have to do to survive. They think they can't get jobs because of their past, and lack of education, and they aren't willing to change that.

My message to these young men is life is great. There's so much to look forward to, and it's a blessing from God to be able to look back and review the life you've had. That's where wisdom comes from.

Stop trying to give it all away. It's not worth it, and once you get the foolishness out of the way, you'll see how beautiful it will be to reach old age.

I appeal to all The Beat Within young men who read this to change their thinking and protect each other. It's important that all of you embrace life and be grateful to have it.

I'll Know Better Next Time

When a judge tells you that he's giving you enough time to think about all the people affected by your crime, that is exactly what he means.

Regardless of what activity you're involved in, your mind constantly reflects on every decision made, every place traveled and every person met throughout the journey that was your life.

Chances are that if you've ever had any type of relationship with an incarcerated person, you've crossed their minds a thousand times. For me, friends and enemies share equal billing during my moments of introspection. First I remember a face, then a name, and finally an event or circumstance will come to mind that corresponds with the particular memory.

Inevitably, I find myself confronted with questions like, "What if?" and statements beginning with, "If only." For every instance my brain computes what seems like a million different scenarios, all of which are better than the original.

It's during these moments that I began to question everything I've ever heard anyone say about life. Statements like, "If I could do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing," instantly begin to sound like bull-! In prison, regret is your constant companion. It looks back at you from the mirror in the morning when you think of the hundreds of places you could be outside of the box you now call home.

How can a person live an entire life and not regret one decision made? There are days when I've regretted getting out of bed, not to mention most things I did between the ages of 15 and 30.

Life is full of mistakes, missteps, bad decisions and just plain stupid ones. When I fantasize about where I would start my life over if given the chance. I always end up back inside my mother's womb... it's the only place I can go to do it all over again and change everything.

To Live We Must Die

We should all have more appreciation for life. It is something that is very precious and can be taken away at anytime.

Some of us take life for granted. We live as if we are guaranteed there will be a tomorrow. But if we stop long enough to look around us, we begin to notice a lot of the people who have traveled with us are gone.

It's a shame when that journey is cut short by the hands of another — no one has the right to cut anyone's life short. But when you hold no value on life, the life of another is not important to you.

It's easy for some to use violence to make their point or to settle arguments. That is a behavior that is picked up from their environment. To enjoy life, you first have to understand what it is.

Life is something God Grants you. Once you've been given life, the first thing you have to do is appreciate it. You have to enjoy it and allow others to do the same. You shouldn't grow up angry and dissatisfied with your life and take it out on others.

From the time you are born, you start dying. What happens in between determines whether the journey was worthwhile or just a waste.

Don't live your life to waste. Don't treat it like it means nothing. Don't treat the lives of others like it means nothing. Everyone deserves an opportunity to decide what they want to do with their lives.

It's a shame we can't live together in harmony without trying to destroy each other. There's nothing worth the kind of anger and hostility that would make you kill someone.

This sentiment probably falls on deaf ears, because there will always be a group of people who just don't care. I count on the ones that do to make a difference and try to turn around the ones who don't.

•NASIR DAVIS•

Baby — It's Your Choice (Do Right)

A lot of times we act on impulse and are shocked at the consequences of those impulses when it is time to deal with them. And whether it's committing a crime, getting caught and having to do time, or having unprotected sex, then having to take care of a baby, it's not wise for us to act on sudden impulses and deal with the consequences when they arise. We must be prepared in our thinking so as not to put ourselves in positions we can't handle. Nasir, who's been really consistent lately, writes about people who are having babies when they're not ready. It's an extremely controversial topic because "being ready to have a child" can be defined in a number of different ways — it really depends on who's using that term at the time. For instance, is a millionaire who can't connect with children ready? Is someone living from paycheck to paycheck but loves the idea of raising a child ready? Must a person be stable in all areas: financially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, etc. to "be ready" to have a child? And if so, who is ever ready? There are many factors one must consider before taking such a life-altering step and those who haven't attempted to consider such factors usually fall short of the parental bar that's placed upon them after taking such a huge step. There are many different perspectives on having a baby (even in our little office), so we can't side with anyone — to each its own. However, after reading Nasir's opinion on the matter we can't help but believe he has a very relevant point and for that we're appreciative. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA. Thank you for your concern...

You know there's a lot of debate and poppy cock nowadays about people having children and not being responsible for their children as they grow up. I've just been sitting back and looking at this issue from all angles and it doesn't matter who you are, rather you're rich or poor, Black, Mexican, Asian, White or either man, woman, this applies to all. I believe everyone on this god given planet should examine themselves thoroughly before even considering having children with the above mentioned in mind.

Now with that having been said please allow me to lay out for you clearly why I believe and feel the way I feel on this issue. See if two people (man & woman) are not in a loving committed MARRIAGE and are going to be their for their child through that child's whole life, no matter what, then they shouldn't even create a precious innocent baby. People shouldn't be having sex period if you're not ready to be a responsible parent because anything else is to just satisfy your selfish wants, and not needs.

People should think long and hard about bringing a life into this world, especially the way things are today in 2007. If a person wants a child they should think twice as long as hard about it, and being there for that child in every area and step of the way of that child's life. Babies are not asked to be brought into this world but we decide to bring them in this world with our actions through sex. And I'm not even speaking on unprotected sex, because we shouldn't even have to have condoms, birth control pills, the morning after pill or anything to stop a baby from coming into this world. If you're not ready for a baby, ladies (girls) close your legs and keep them closed till you're in a loving marriage and guys (boys) if you're not ready for a baby the same thing applies for you, keep your thing in your pants and keep it that way till you find a virtuous wife. It's not hard but we complicate things because we think if we're not doing what everyone else is doing then we are missing out on something, and you see that's where we're wrong at because 9 times out of 10 we truly ain't missing nothing. Trust me I'm talking from experience people.

A lot of babies nowadays are lust babies, crack babies or simply put unwanted babies by their biological parents. See when a baby is conceived out of lust (look up lust in the dictionary) that baby will grow up to be a lust baby and not a loved baby even though my parents were married when I was born and before I was born I was still a lust baby because trust me neither didn't give a dang about me and my whole life is evident to that. See a lust baby will grow up and be a wild child a black sheep of the bunch so to speak. He or she will create havoc and continue the same process of the lust baby syndrome if someone doesn't step in and help them stop the curse. See a lust baby lust after everything in this world that their eyes can behold and look upon greedily. Lust just ain't got to do with the flesh on a physical level; it's on every level. You know I've heard a singer say my mind is telling me no but my body's telling me yes sometimes that true, but a lot of times it's our mind telling us yes and our bodies ain't got squat to do with it because we don't have no control over the mind.

There's a saying, capture the mind and the body will follow; I know that statement to be true. So if you guard your mind and what you allow to come into your mind the baby issue won't be a problem. Our mind is where a lot of our problems stem from; we've got to exercise our minds and not just muscles man and woman. If it's to be up to you, don't create no baby till you're ready that is you and your husband or wife.

I hope and pray I helped somebody out there with bringing a baby in this world before they're truly ready. If we govern ourselves then no one else will have to do it for us. Peace & love!

•CHRIS GRAJEDA•

Livin' Life Fast

We have never witnessed such a drastic change of ideas and beliefs from one individual. That's why we have so much love for this next writer. And anyone who knows The Beat, knows the name Chris Grajeda. We first met him in Alameda County Juvenile Hall when he was fighting a very serious case. Back then we brought guests up there to talk to the unit and he was by far the most challenging. With his passionate belief in a lifestyle that consisted of gangs and violence, his stubbornness outweighed his physical stature. But now, wisdom has set in and he's experiencing a change in thinking for the better and we really enjoy watching him blossom because we've always believed in his potential. He's now writing from the Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy, CA, and he sends us a poem called, "Livin' Life Fast." It's a great poem from a great writer.

In prison with to much stress on my shoulders:
The world is weighing me down, blemish boulders by boulders:
Despair is taking over my body, my soul, my mind:
As I sit in this cell reminiscing on past times:

There's too much sorrow and pain within these prison walls:
But yet I still manage to stick my chest out and stand tall:
But as I stick my chin in the air and wear my pride on my back:
I'm slowly dieing inside from the vacant love lack:

In prison I reside, and I'm growing older each day:
Can't get rid of all my anxiety and anguish, it won't go away:
Prisons a world within it self, hectic government scandal:
It ain't nothing new that us inmates can't handle:

Over all I miss my family and friends:
I miss their personal presence that seem to never come to an end:
Now that I think about my mistakes I committed in the past:
They were such foolish deeds, now I regret living life fast!!!

The Gangsters Tip

The chokehold is getting tight as the rag is covering my sight;
I've reconciled with the past and broke it down at last.
Gangsters tip type cast
Heartless, blindness, no time left, grand theft,
No chance for a do over,
As my character is being tested for the life that I've wasted.
I fallen and risen in these terms of enduring punishment.
Unable to cry, to say goodbye to those who died,
Life isn't a fairy tale but a lie.
Leaving it all behind trying to make the right decision
Isolation in this reckless incarceration.
In and out of dangerous situations angry, lost.
The devil has a hold on me written in stone.
The faith of living in isolation alone
As time passes by so slow so distant in darkness so bold
That everything just feels so wrong
The war is not going away anytime soon.
The hate in the heart has bloomed
In the land of the blind the one eye man is king.
But there is no power if you can't live free.
No chance for a do over just lonely as it could be.
Once again my character is being tested the time I wasted.
The good boy is long gone a new man has appeared
With a moniker that any man can fear,
The bullet has hit its mark,
Where there's smoke there's fire any one can get burned.
What you get is what you find
With isolation you pay the crime
All which little I had is now gone.
My identity changed for in inadverted infinity
Thing that was, things that are and the ones that are yet to come Spent in the shadows without sun.
Like being stuck in quicksand pulling me deeper and deeper
That I just can't understand.
My life, my heart and soul
Forever gone, forever cold.
Only words are left written.
No action, no one to hold, no satisfaction.
Just another soul that has been lost.
A traveler of time and space, seeing death face to face
And in a flash it could be gone without a trace
Like drinking poison water that has been laced
This is the art of deception crossroads of a gangster's intersection.
No man throws away his life if it isn't worth keeping
Walking in a daze you been sleeping
With action one sees different reactions
Been there and done that.
These are not just stories but facts
A boy that just went bad his past is haunting him at last
Quit stalling been free falling
With the images of time still burning in the mind.
The thing I think I know evaporated with the pistol smoke.
Everywhere I go I still stay behind nothing left but time
Ripped, tripped and now script
This is the life of a gangster's tip...

Here at The Beat Within we try to respect everyone's opinion as long as it isn't harmful to others. We attempt, each week, to provide a voiced platform to the voiceless and in doing so we need to be aware of the vast spectrum in differences of opinion. However, sometimes people feel like we're putting certain opinions on a pedestal while knocking others down. Or sometimes people feel like we're stepping on others toes. Our intentions are always good and we try to remain as neutral as possible. This next writer, who's been writing us for quite some time now, challenges something he read in issue 12.08. We can't say we agree or disagree with either side, but we can say we are fortunate to be a part of a dialogue where people are both reinforcing stereotypes and also trying to break them down. There are so many people behind the scenes trying to make this publication possible, so it does get frustrating hearing the same ol', same ol'. And we think this next writer is tired of the same. He's writing from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA. We hope no one's toes are stepped on and we can continue to learn from one another.

Let me open my heart to you,
Release the butterfly
from his cocoon...

The Young And The Restless

With the power of words
One can display his venomous poison of warfare,
The hate we share, wear, and tear.
Every story has a beginning and an end,
The story of the Young and Restless
In hardship has learned to blend,
But whatever has happened in the past could stay in the past,
Pain and strife could be stopped at last.
We have to stop blaming everyone around us for our misery
And put it all behind in the book of history.
Safety, serenity, love & peace
Will come when the hate from our heart is finally released.
We go along always blaming him, her and them
For all the failures of our life's mistakes
When in reality it is us whom should hold the blame.
Too many whom have suffered as well as me
But just like you I have refused to see
And let it all go,
The feeling that everything is coming too slow.
Hoping to finally feel peace from within,
But first we must let the good lord in,
We at times crave what we never had
And we start to be mad and sad.
We self-destruct
All because we are not brave enough to unleash our vicious self.
I guess it's not impossible but we need someone's help,
Can you hear my words my lord?
Can you hold my hand and walk me through your loving door?
Can you be forgiving enough to touch my heart? Soul?
Please release my bottled tears and finally let them flow.
My heart has endured this punishment for way too long.
Release me from my pride and let me feel love once again inside.
Let me open my heart to you,
Release the butterfly from his cocoon...

What's Popping Familia!

I extend my saludos y respetos in hopes to find all young mind chilaxin doing the damn thang! Please excuse this brief saludos, I would like to address the poem written by "Alihi" in volume 12.08 called "Palabra"

I sincerely extend my support and understand what you're trying to accomplish with your poem brother, I myself been locked up for many years and have all day. We all know what comes with the territory if you play games. But to my view you're exposing too much even if you're trying to make a change in your life. More power to you!

But don't misguide the youth with your words brother. You're way beyond your overly exaggerated self. You wrote, "Be a man, stand up be a man" but at the same time your hiding behind the Moniker "Alibi" if you're a man then put your real name down, your letting every reader know about the kite that was slipped under your door! Your just exposing game and not taking in consideration what goes on with the people you are exposing. Whom exposes game try to benefit by throwing someone else in the lions pit. If you're not content with how things are where you are at then speak up and let it be known. Don't be a coward, "a cell soldier" I write about stuff that goes on with life and let the youth learn from my mistakes, and hopefully they think before they do, but most of us only learn from experience and if they decide to continue this path I hope at least they'll find a veterano to school them right!

You speak of politics without structure brother this place would be chaos and cops would still be abusing inmates. The world works with rules and guidelines and this is no different. Now we at least have discipline and guidelines brother. Yes nothing is mandatory but keep in mind that people, warriors whom put in work in and out of the SHU all the time have helped you guys in the mainline to kick back and eat burritos and drink sodas. I don't mind the sacrifice but I do mind you undermining while your kicking back getting fat. So please don't misguide youth with be a man and stand up. How ever you choose to do your time in respected but don't disrespect those whom have open the way for you to chill on the yard and next time I hope you stand up and be a man. Write your real name I fear no man but God, I hope the readers get a different perspective about prison. We do look out for each other power comes in numbers, and like J said, "woman lie, man lie, but numbers don't."

A place that criminalizes your culture by claiming the language spoken by your ancestors and symbols in something as simple as a flag, is all gang related.

FRANK SERRANO

Imagine A Place

If you think that you can continue to do what you're doing forever and what we mean by that is continuing to live a lifestyle that puts your life at risk without losing it to death or incarceration, we have special news for you this week. Well actually, we don't but this next writer does. He writes an incredible poem to the youngsters about imagining a place. And if you haven't guessed it already the place is prison and he's in one of the worst ones in California. He's writing from the Pelican Bay State Prison's Security Housing Unit in Crescent City, CA. He explains it in great detail and with each line we can't help but cringe at the thought of having to spend even a chunk of our lives in there. Too bad some of you youngsters don't feel the same way because you may not feel that way until you're in there and it's too late. Some of you won't even pick this up and read it because you're just worried about your piece getting in, and we understand, however you should be aware that there are people out there who care about you and your well-being, even if you don't know it. We appreciate all Frank has given to us thus far and hopefully this next poem won't fall on deaf ears because what he's saying is definitely worthwhile. Thank you Frank, we can't wait for more...

Imagine a place where you're locked up 23 hours a day.
A place where the future is uncertain,
The past is constantly on your mind,
And the present flows by but to you, it seems to stand still.
Imagine a place that dulls your senses and distorts your emotions.
A place barren in stimulation
This is a place that buries you alive;
Where the concrete chill is enduring
And the warmth of the sun is but a fleeing memory.
No, it's not where you are now, not in the least!
Imagine a place that violates it's own rules and regulations
To keep you in a cell independently.
A place that criminalizes your culture by claiming the language spoken by your ancestors and symbols in something as simple as a flag, is all gang related.
This is a place that labels you as a gang member/associate on the word of an informant who doesn't know you and worst, on fabricated documents.
Imagine a place that, by design, is operating with the sole purpose of breaking you mentally; to deplete you of your strength and sanity.
Now imagine this place attempting to prevent you from gaining good time credit for an early parole; as a lifer, from acquiring a parole date.
Sounds familiar yet? It's not where you are.
Here, worms of rage eat at your mind and flesh.
This place has an agenda: to make you a snitch,
Break up families, or hope that you die by your own hands
Can you imagine this place, do you deny it exist?
Yeah, it sounds unreal to me as well but can you imagine a place that discriminates on a group of people for just being from the southern part of a state?
This is a place that denies you a cell-mate and prefers to keep you in solitary confinement, for years just because they feel they can.
Do you like this place so far? I don't have to imagine it – I'm there now!
This place is called Pelican Bay
What I described is only part of what goes on.
You young kids sitting in Juvenile Hall think you have it hard now. Keep on acting like a super gangster and this is where you'll end up. More than half of you will become informants, ultimately, that tough act will be just that – an act, because the hard core ones are always the most scared ones.
Imagine yourself in this place doing life.
Imagine yourself in a cell for a decade; two, three, or four, until your old. Your childhood, teenage, and adult years are but memories – most of it wasted years: nothing to show for it.
Imagine that being you. You're on that path now.

ALEX SHELTON

Gran'pa Warned Me

The engraving on the head stone reads 1921 to 1992
In a prison cage, going to his funeral was out of the "G"
Locked and trapped cell door capped
It wasn't allowed so I conducted my own memorial service
of a happy, strict and adventurous man,
Who was getting furiously mad only once-in a blue moon
It was part of the wisdom trail
And me looking pale
Gran'pa warned me with zealous speech and serious eyes
As the smoke poofed from his pipe
And the scent wrinkled my nose
I didn't mind didn't want his storytelling attractions
Pf the 30s, 40s and rolling 50s to come to a close
Holding in my small hands the black and white cracked
pictures
Of people that passed away with warnings a plenty
I'm switching years and indulging in gran'pas warning like
flying spears Golden sand flowing thru the hour glass crack
Color box on the rack
It seems like clock hands are trying to sign me a warning
Zapping my date gran'pa I'm still in mourning
Outlets of your memory ringing
To stop g banging now its angels singing
And when you once said any man who'll pick up a dirty dish
As opposed to putting one down gets an A for effort from me
And the time we
I forgot you didn't want to get in the cold lake
Splash and dash. You'd rather stay home and with grams
And bake a cake
With me bouncing and tumbling around on my Mongoose
bike
Or us taking a hike
Watch out for that don't be such a brat
I would get real thrilled playing soccer using your backyard
as a field Watching gran'pa cooking up the ribs and the
chicken his way
So tasty me standing over the grill
Trying to be like him my turn
Okay he said as long as you keep an eye on them so they
don't burn
Grandpa I'm no longer with them gangsters 16 years ago
And I'm thinking today how gran'pa warned me

We are always pleased when this next writer sends us something because we know we're in store for a treat. This week he hits us with a couple poems, both of which are absolutely worth reading, especially the second one. He talks about memories he had of his Gran'pa. And they were mostly of him warning his grandson, hence the title, "Gran'pa Warned Me." He projects really vivid and innocent memories that he had with his grandpa. We really liked the image of staying home and baking cookies with grandma while a young Alex made use of his mountain bike. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA, and we're sure this won't be the last time we hear from him (or at least we hope so).

Iron Tongues

The Beat Within poems calling a tune for the month of June
God bless you and stay 100% True
There's something in common for sure
Got it under my wing, BUT I ain't waiting for the eagle to land
With broken wings it can't demand
Building unstable castles in the sand
Political backbone going sour an endless hour
Seeds and then comes the flower for sure
A G's human nature THIS IRON TONGUE
Don't need to trot out in front of an AUDIENCE with whistles
and claps
I keep mines on paper as my pen quickly taps changing haps
Some IRON TONGUES love to spark-up
The standing megaphone of mass media etc, etc.
Dedicate to the touch like a bubble
Trying to stay in the air, but eventually popping.
Can't fly all the same, in common, round and clean,
Shiny and markedly glitzy hollow inside
Death glide bloated with a silky sigh looking like a teardrop cry
I can think of hundreds of ways to filter throughout the year
So lay the groundwork for Gods blessings that will occur
Don't be just another flea infested cat fur
Pick up the broken pieces, don't be slow
Think of heaven's neon glow
You can do it if you keep trying
Skate out of the "G" turf pinning
"See then that ye walk circumspectly
Not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time,
Because the days are evil.

E-MONEY

This Is What Writing Does For Me

Sometimes this next writer has the tendency to toot his own horn. But he has every right to because he's been dropping bombs on us since The Beat's inception back in '96. This week he writes about what writing does for him. And although we don't feel like it's his best piece (just keepin' it real), it still has his name written all over it. He talks about how his mind is what holds strength, it's where life starts and ends and we believe that to the fullest. And if you think this man's mind is all over the map sometimes, then you're probably blinded by his deep thoughts, which permeate off the page each time he writes. He's writing from San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, CA. Hopefully, he'll be home soon, so he can once again have the opportunity to put words into action.

One thing I'm learning with maturity is the mind is beautiful! Learn to dwell within its presence and its recordance is guaranteed to grant you the heart of wisdom. It's the true picture of life. Its biography proves prosperity. It's where life starts and ends; not in the actual world.

I've been going through life living an illusion not realizing heaven never left me I left it. How could I be foolish not to realize that heaven is right here within me? Maybe that's because my mis-education conditioned me to a genocide of worldly things while it robbed me of my diamond called, "Life of the Mind."

My love for the mind depicts me so strength holding that which is written in ink or manufactured wood known as the treasures of my pre-incarcerated memory age 27". My writings derived from recordance of the mind. Would be like going back in time and bringing life to the death of this precious age. Imagine me holding onto something so many others still wished they had, and that's youth. Forever young through the memory of my mind. This is what writing does for me.

Currency in this life cannot buy memory. Only the mind has the unspoken gift to purchase that prize. Now that I have found me I have a better understanding of my purpose in my life. My love for life is "Writing" and it's one of the only times I have a chance to acknowledge me. How could I ever take myself away from it like so many others had mistakenly done. It makes me wonder do the saying proves true, "It's not life that you ultimately fear, but you." It makes sense if you consider the fact, "Ease is famous of selection, (not thinking) complication is often neglected" (the mind) but in it lies the true way. My writings will ultimately sustain my life.

The visions that live in my mind is so beautiful that it'll be active not to share it with the world. I'll be exonerated of all charges once I paint these visions across your mind and you will crown me king and inventor of "another incredible creation". My present to you would be the keys to freedom. Are you sure you're licensed to drive?

My purpose is to write and my goal is to be remembered as a godly profit. You will not have to worry about coming in contact with me and leaving empty handed. To see me would be like seeing diamond, ruby, and gold mixed. Like I said before, I'm one of a kind. My presence brings confusion, is he a god or angel? Leaving you stagnated in a state of "star struck." So if you're interested in tuning in to my love for life, you can find me under the category "this is what writing does for me."

TBW THE BEAT WITHOUT

RAFAEL CABRERA

The Beat Within

I wish you all the best in 2007! You have to make the best decisions for yourselves. Don't allow pressure or influence do anything that is going against your better judgment.

Believe me, I've been there. I'm on my 25th year in prison. I came in at eighteen years of age. As a teenager I thought my parents didn't understand and that I knew what was best for me — I thought I knew it all! No one could tell me what to do or not to do. If I was told not to, I would do it and sometimes only to see what they would do or just to get them mad. Looking back I wish I would of paid attention, but I thought I knew it all. We've heard that we can learn by other people's mistakes. When the opportunity is there I hope you do. See there are two ways to learn: 1.) The easy way — through other people; and 2.) The hard way — through your own bad calls and mistakes.

Usually the people that don't listen and want to learn on their own don't have it so good. Many in the joint are here because they didn't listen to good advice and we knew what was better for us. We didn't plan to come to prison we just didn't want to make the right thing what was best for us and so we are found in the school of hard knocks. After many years in prison some of us gain a bit of wisdom and wish we had learned from others mistakes by listening to them — sometimes they were our parents, family, friends, or we were able to see something, in a movie or series, that gave us a chance to see what was going to be the outcome — our demise if we went down that road.

If anyone of us is going to go to another state and are not familiar with the roads then we will need to use a map and looking at it might not give us the answer. We may need to ask people for further direction.

If you haven't asked for help because you know it all and no one can tell you what to do — then I would say to listen because I was there once — as a teenager and now I'm here — in prison.

Though we all come from various worlds I believe many of us come from a place where the homeboys and homegirls mean a lot to us and we feel good around them. When I was in high school there were groups like cliques of people: all the football players ran together; the wrestlers; the people that studied very much (nerds); drug users ran together; and there were many groups. I ran with a group of homies. We thought we were better than the other groups and I'm sure every group criticized every other group and thought they were better. One thing is certain today and that is that I wish I would have been able to see that the group I was in wasn't going anywhere except to prison, hospitals, or toward a quick death. In other words, it was and is a dead end to go with the homeboys and homegirls, everything we did was negative and that was expected. Now I look around and the only people that are not dead or in prison from the group I ran with are successful — meaning they are free, married, parents and have good jobs, and homes. They did this by leaving the group and doing what was best for them.

Some people come in and out of jail. They haven't decided to leave the group — this lifestyle. This lifestyle is a road of misery and it doesn't only affect you, it affects those that really care and love you and those that you may have intentionally transgressed, beat up, robbed, threatened, threatened, or other. Those that left the group are out there on the streets with their kids, ol' man/ ol' lady, have a good job and home and we all here in the joint.

If we see that this is a dead end then why should you think that it is going to be any better for you? Do you think that you're not going to get a life sentence? So did many of us and like I said no one planned to come to prison. If you run with the group that is the gang/barrio — the homeboys and homegirls, then this is for you because I was there and no one could tell me any better and I know a group of friends that are in the hole all over the prison system that, if honest, like me would tell you don't follow in our footsteps. Do something better with your lives. Set an education and empower your peers and try to change the course of your group.

These men in prison, if honest, would, as I, prefer to see our brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, and you on the streets and being productive members in society than in a cage in prison — a cell with another person and no privacy. Remember, you can learn from our mistakes and hear us out or you can die the knucklehead. And learn from your own mistakes. The choice is yours. The easy or hard way. One way or another your fate is in your hands. No one can force you to do one or the other.

We really enjoy this next writer because his heart bleeds for the younger generation. In fact, both of his pieces this week reflect that. The first, "Straight Life Program," is a program that he's involved in where they basically give at-risk youth a tour of the prison and show them the ins and outs of what goes on in there. He stresses the fact that they're not like a Scared Straight program where they get all in the kid's face (he believes that has little effect) rather than talking and relating to them out of sheer respect. He even gave us the program's brochure. From what we've read it sounds like a worthwhile program. Then, true to form, he concludes with a piece about how we should begin to learn from other's mistakes rather than just our own. Often times we must experience things to learn them, which is okay sometimes, but other times using this method, we don't learn until we feel like it's too late. At least with learning from other people, we don't have to actually suffer the consequences to become wise. Instead we can see someone else touch the fire to realize we don't want to touch it ourselves. However, it requires a tremendous amount of empathy to learn from other's mistakes, and in this day and age our whole society is lacking empathy. He's writing from Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA. We are grateful to be able to share his compassion with the rest of you. Thank you Rafael...

Straight Life Program

Greeting to everyone that takes part in "The Beat Within." May "The Beat" continue to plant conscious news and enlightenment "Within" those that serve.

Here is a word about the Straight Life Program at California State Prison, California. This is an at-risk program for the youth and anyone else that would like to tour the prison and understand it from prisoners. The tour starts off with a few men speaking of their experiences, this is a presentation. We then take a tour of the yard, explaining how if you don't have an assignment job you are all to get to the yard between two to three hours a day Monday through Friday. On Saturday and Sunday, you stay in the cell. It takes about four years before you get a job, if you're lucky. We point out the politics and drama about the yards in prison and we pass through the canteen (store) — you only go if your people send you cash because ninety-nine percent of the jobs in prison don't pay you and the ones that do usually pay between ten to twenty cents a day; clothing room — where you get handed down used clothes; the medical office — where you turn in a slip because you're sick and want medical attention that you will not get for a few weeks — if that; and then, we eat lunch in the dining hall. There we are able to sit with the guests and answer questions or hear them out.

Once that is out of the way, we proceed to a housing unit where two-hundred men live, and the guests are able to step in the cells afforded. They are able to see first hand that their privacy is given up when they come to prison. In prison no one is afforded any privacy. The cell door can't be covered up, the dim light stays on all day and night, and it's pretty small for two adults, especially on lockdowns. Then, on lockdowns, you shower every three days and your cellmate showers with you. Other than a walk to the medical department, shower, classification or library — for legal and court deadlines only, you are in the cell (cage) with your cellie on lockdowns.
When we've completed with the building, we return to the original meeting place — normally the visiting room and we do a round table of questions (comments) and answers.

Such a tour is best during the day, but we also have serviced in the evening hours, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. This enables parents that wish to come and be a part of the tour, see firsthand and possibly get something that assists them.

We do not bark (scare) at the children. We believe that children can gain more if we treat them with respect and dignity. Embarrassing them only makes them shut the door and lose anything valuable one may have had to say to them. We are not enemies, we're conveying a warning about consequences.

We trust that once they have observed and experienced the tour that they will be able to make educated and wise decisions when confronted by/with difficult choices.

WILD BILL BARNES:

Yes, and finally, we've received the fourth chapter to, "George Goes To Jail." It was by far the most anticipated chapter yet because Wild Bill and George Bush had just done a porno shoot with Brittany Spears and Christina Aguilera (fiction writing of course). In chapter three Wild Bill and George Bush escape from jail and the chapter ended with them about to do a shoot with the celebrities. He didn't let us down as now in this chapter, and when we thought it couldn't get any better, Brittany and Christina introduce them to Madonna and a very special woman that they end with. We won't give that part away. It will truly be a surprise and now Chapter Five is our most anticipated chapter. However, this was his second piece. The first, is a song called, "Baghdad Radio," where he points out the violence and destruction that's coming along with our war over in the Middle East. It's very disturbing, but again, he's just reflecting the images that come along with going to war. We wonder if his characterized George Bush in the book, "George Goes To Jail," would fight in the war. We personally like his created George way more than the real one. And that's another testament to the power of words. When one can take an evil man and make him be seen as funny and warm hearted, that's a very talented writer. He's writing from Marion Correctional Institution in Marion, North Carolina. We can't wait for chapter five, but we guess we're going to have to.

Baghdad Radio

Chorus: (Soft Rock)
BAGHDAD RADIO
Listenin' to the
BAGHDAD RADIO…

We gotta tune in the BAGHDAD RADIO
they got bad jams
And lions layin' down with the lambs
On the BAGH-DAD RA-DI-O-O-O-O-WO-WO-WO-WOAH!
{FOUR TOM–TOM BEATS]

1st Verse: (Hardcore Rap)
We got static
We got bombs
We got visions of
The apocalypse to come…

We got body parts
Carnage galore

(Rock/Rap Hybrid)
We got goon squads
Smashin' in doors…

We got songs
Of death and defeat
Sick rhythms
Of bloody streets…

Boom! Boom! Boom!
Out go the lights…
The sun goes down
On another bloody night…

So we gotta tune our dial
And get it just right
Machine gun drum beats
Thru the long, dark night…
(On our…)

REPEAT CHORUS

2ND Verse
I.E.D.'S
On the airport road
R.P.G.'s
Make the gas-tankers explode…

It's a groovy sound
Once it's down in your soul
Once you go crazy
You'll never know…

Welcome to
The pretty green zone
Step right in
Make yourself at home…

We got three stooges on TV
And they're runnin' this show too
That's plain to see…

"Mission Accomplished"
yeah, my ass
I sure bet George
Could move mighty fast…

When the firefight started
He'd run like hell
Just like a yellow scalded dog
He'd tuck his tail…

But that's okay
We know what song to play…
We listen to our station
Night and day….
((it's the…)

REPEAT CHORUS
("Lions) layin' down with the lambs"
changes to "sons of sams")

3rd Verse:
We got Sunni's
With an urge to kill
We got Shiites
With electric drills…

We got bodies
In the Euphrates
We got warring factions
Impossible to please…

We got torsos over here
And heads over there
Blood and guts
scattered everywhere…

We got hostages
Pay Up! Or it's off
With their heads…
Try to make it to morning
before you're dead…

Douse everybody
With kerosene
strike a match
and listen to 'em scream…

you get to where
you love that sound
the Baghdad radio is the
best station in town… Yea

Bridge:
(with explosions, gunfire, tires screeching, sirens, screams of despair, and any and all other sound effects that would help convoy an atmosphere of Satan enjoying his very own "Drunken orgy of Violence…")

4th Verse:
we got children dyin'
and widows cryin'
we got suits and ties
doin' some mighty big
lyin'…

We got billions of dollars
all misspent
only a few know
where all the money went…

we got Halli Burton
and nurses flirtin'
wounded civilians
layin' around hurtin'…

oh their screams
of agony
make such a hellish
symphony…

It's #1 with a bullet
On the top ten list
I guess "goodbye" to my
Sweet ass
I can kiss…

But, at my funeral
Don't play no "Taps"
Just give me some of that lovely…
Baghdad Rap!
(like they play on the…)

Repeat original Chorus

George Goes To Jail Chapter 4

Learning we were to "work" – if you could call it that – with the two famous celebs couldn't help but make us even more nervous. But they were sweet and reassuring, and, somehow, we got the scenes shot.

Steve handed me 1000 dollars and George 2000. Happily flushed with cash, we asked the two ladies to dinner.

"Yeah, sure, why not?" Christina said.

We rode with them in their limo to a swanky steakhouse on Ventura Boulevard to, hopefully, lessen our chances of being spotted by paparazzi, we got out a block away, then walked to the restaurant. "Wow. Me and an ex-president. Is this even going to get some publicity…" Brittany said.

"Yeah. I've got to admit, George and I were quite shocked, to say the least, to learn just who our co-stars were to be…" I responded. "Aren't you girls worried about damaging your images?" Christina laughed. "Remember one old, golden Hollywood Maxim, honey: 'There is no such thing as bad publicity! Unless, of course, you're Michael Jackson…" She added, causing us all to crack up.

"Our first video we did a month ago," Brittany told us. "Christina double-dared me, and I took her up on it!" She explained as she and Christina started giggling.

Christina took a daily sip of Zinfandel, then used her napkin to wipe away a tear of laughter. "I mean, look, it's like this: Brittany and I had long wanted to be porn stars. It was just a matter of finally workin' up our nerve enough to cross that line…"

"Yeah, sure, we decided we didn't wish to just simply leave our 'Mouseketeer, virginal school-girl' images behind, we wanted to smash and grind 'em in the dirt forever…" Brittany said. "Beyond all redemption."

"Well, uh, From Mouseketeers to hot little porno dears," George said, smirking.

They smiled, "Yep. That's about the size of it," Cristina responded. "Besides, you know, 'mainstream Hollywood' and 'X-rated Hollywood' have been growing closer and closer for years. Lots of adult stars have been making cameo appearances in 'regular' productions. It was just a matter of who would dare to go first the other way...

"Besides, Brittany and I have basically been sellin' sex all along. Figured we might as well be honest about it and go all the way. Give our legions of loyal fans what they really want, you know… Show 'em just 'non-celibate' a couple celebrities could be," she added, causing her and Brittany to break up into giggles again.

"Yeah, and Madonna's the one who taught us all about 'shock value.' Not to mention teachin' us how to kiss other girls in public…" Brittany said, and they giggled even more.

"Wow George and I must have been really out of the loop… We hadn't heard nothing about it. I mean, you two doin' this must be causing 'ET' and 'Access Hollywood' and all those type of shows to go ape… Not to mention the tabloids."

"Yeah, this must be causing the 'Mother of all tabloid feeding Frenzies,' as my ol' buddy Saddam would say…" George observed.

"Oh, we're sure it will…" Christina said. "But, see, so far, it's only been 'juicy rumors.' Remember what Brittany told you? Our first shoot was only a month ago. Steve hasn't released anything yet. And, I suspect, now that he's got you involved, George, what we did today will be the first one out. For this, I will suspect, I will truly be the 'Mother of all Publicity Stunts'."

An ancient waiter, who looked like Abe Vigoda, appeared with our steaks.

After he departed, I said, "Wow, George and I had best be workin' on our disguises and gettin' on out of town ahead of this…"

"Yeah, you'd probably better…" Christina said, and she and Brittany cracked up again.

We were all pretty tipsy by the time the eating and drinking were all done, especially since George and I hadn't drank anything in a long time. A good thing we had "Juma" their good-natured chauffer/bodyguard as our "designated driver."

Juma was a black fellow, about 40, with a baldhead, a moustache, and a jolly attitude. He got out of the long blue limo when he saw us coming. He held the door for us.

"Mizz Brittany, Mizz Christina, uh, Mister President…" He greeted… "Would it be proper for me to salute sir, or what?"

"No, that won't be necessary. Those days are long gone, I'm afraid… Thanks anyways though," George said.

"And, uh, I don't believe we've yet met sir…" Juma said.

"Wild Bill," I replied, offering him my hand to shake. "Nice to meet you, Juma…" I said, having already "picked up" on his name.

"Good to meet you, Wild Bill," Juma said with a warm smile.

"Well, where to folks?" Juma asked after the closing the door behind us and getting into the driver's seat.

"I tell you what, Madonna's in town. We were talkin' about her earlier. Let's drive by her crib and see what's going on…" Christina said. "Besides, I'm just dyin' to tell her about this little escapade anyway…" She added, causing her and Brittany to giggle wildly yet again.

"10/4. On the way…" Juma replied cheerfully, then he pushed the button to close the privacy glass between his compartment and ours.

"Wow, is Madonna ever gonna be shocked to see you George…" Brittany said.

"Yep. That I imagine she will be…" George smirked. "By the way, you gals wouldn't happen to have any blow on you, would ya?"

"Well, rehab here I can come …" Brittany said, laughing, pulling out a green glass vial with spoon attached from her brassiere.

"Wow, what a wild trip life truly is…" I thought to myself as we rang the doorbell to Madonna's Mansion.

Momentarily, the grande dame of outrageousness herself opened the door. Madonna, like fine wine, had already grown better with time… She looked just fit, sexy as ever.

"Well, Hel-loo…" She enthused, her eyes brightening. Madonna gave each a warm hug and a lingering kiss, which, I must confess, I rather enjoyed watching. These are our new friends, Wild Bill and George W. Bush, ex-president, and now porn star convict on the run…" Is how Christina introduced us

Madonna, as I'd well-suspected she would, looked quite shocked at first. "Well, uh-hm, I certainly can't say I supported your policies but, nevertheless, I shall welcome you into my home…" Madonna said, extending her hand.

George hammed it up and, instead of simply shaking it, pulled Madonna's slender hand to his lips and kissed it.

She blushed a little, perhaps slightly charmed in spite of herself. Then she extended her hand to me. "Hello Wild Bill, welcome to mi casa," She said. Smiling graciously.

"Honored to meet you Madonna. Don't worry, George has been learnin' some better Karma lately. I've been helpin' teach him…"

"Well, is that so? Glad to hear it. And speaking of which, we just happen to have quite a unique little religious gathering going on right now, in fact. Please, come join us…"

Just when I thought things couldn't really get any stranger, Madonna led us into a plushly carpeted den, softly illuminated by several sweetly scented votive candles. Incense added to the olfactory potpourri. Upon the floor were both a statue of a serene-looking Buddha and a candle-filled menorah, plus many other items, arranged into a makeshift shrine. Both a short, brown-robed Buddhist monk and an ultra-orthodox rabbi were in attendance.

A lovely black lady arose from her prayers. She had a certain "radiance" about her. To my shock, I recognized Tina Turner.

TBW THE BEAT WITHOUT

SHAWN MONTGOMERY

The Truth About Success

Success is generally defined as a favorable or satisfactory outcome or result. Whatever you do in your life, you get results. Whether or not those results are the ones you desired, is basically whether you succeeded or failed in your endeavors. Success is often defined as the gaining of wealth, fame, rank, etc. however, in the most general terms, success is the continuous realization of the outcomes or results you desire. On the physical level, success is often seen as specific material accomplishments particular type of car, home, status, or income level. However, once the car, home or other material possessions are obtained, there is no further growth in understanding, wisdom, or consciousness. Those who operate on this material level of success generally become consumed with maintaining those possessions, which represent their success. When success is understood on a spiritual level, it is seen as a progressive realization of a worthwhile purpose. You continue to grow and develop in all aspects. On a spiritual level, success is the continuous unfolding of your purpose and destiny. True success is the progressive, continuous effort of attaining your goals and realizing your vision. This guides you to your worthwhile purpose in life.

Success Must Be In Your Mind First! Success starts in your own mind. Constantly have a concept and vision in your mind of what success means to you. "You become what you think about most of the time."

Be Constant In Your Efforts! Never take a break from your success journey. Don't stop for rest and reward too soon. When you stop at the first sign of success, you become stagnant, lazy, and begin to decline. As your efforts begin to produce rewards and results, work even harder. Success and achievement come only through continuous work. The only place that success comes before work is in the dictionary.

Get Away From The Crowd At The Bottom! One of the most difficult steps you will face on your success journey is getting away from the crowd at the bottom. There are many unsuccessful, mediocre people who have failed to recognize, or act on their true potential. If you constantly associate with them, your success journey will be short lived. You must clear the deck to make room for new associates who will complement and enhance your success efforts. Once you break away from the mediocre crowd, accept the temporary state of loneliness, and prepare for your success.

Be Willing To Change Your Life Completely! You must be willing to change your life completely. Make your life congruent with, consistent with, and harmonic with your desired success. Is there anything about the way you think or feel about yourself that will frustrate your success efforts? If so, handle it immediately. Do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to become the person that you must be to accomplish your goals and realize your vision. Everyday, in every way, I'm getting better and better.

The Saboteur Within! Often when you begin your journey on the path there appears to be a negative part of you that works against the positive things you attempt to do. It is in disharmony, with the positive part of you, which pursues your goals, vision, and purpose. This negative part of you functions as a saboteur in all your endeavors.

The tools of this saboteur are: distractions, discouragement, distrust, doubt, indecision, procrastination, apathy, arrogance, isolation and low self-esteem. This saboteur is neutralized by constantly focusing your attention, your actions and your feelings, on your goals, vision or purpose, to focus your attention, your actions, and your feelings requires self discipline or self control.

Self Discipline! To have self-control, or self-discipline, means that you have taken possession of your mind in such strength or degree that your emotions, your instincts, and your body are under your control. Self-discipline is control from within. Your self-discipline begins with your thoughts. If you cannot control your thoughts, you cannot control your actions or your emotions. When you have control over your thoughts, you can never be mastered by others. You will always be able to take possession of whatever you are entitled to or deserve. True wisdom comes only through self-understanding. Based on self-discipline. When you have self-discipline, discipline from outside is unnecessary. You are then your own boss, the captain of your ship. Your own initiative causes you to get a job done, or task complete.

When you live without discipline, you die without dignity.

This next writer is not only versatile in his writing (he writes essays and poems with great skill), but he's also versatile in his thinking. Whether he's giving us the anecdote for success or expressing the mixed emotions he feels dealing with his mother's death, this Beat Without veteran gives us something we've been longing for — a genuine heart. It's writing like this that refreshes us after a long day of dealing with politics, both in the country and also right here in the office. He offers the lessons he's learned and with each one we find ourselves learning something new. There will be more to come next week because if we published everything he sent us this week there would be no room for the rest of you. His first two pieces, "The Truth About Success" and "Seven Ways To Improve Your Self-Discipline" are really in your face ways on how to better yourself. It's almost like these ideas could've come straight out of a book because he expresses himself so well. Then, the next four after that are basically what him and his peers have had to endure being Black men where White people are the majority. These pieces are very telling because we can't deny him of his experiences and since he's speaking from experience, we can't deny his speech (not that we would want to anyway). And then he concludes with an incredible piece about his mother passing away. We really enjoyed what she left behind for him because nowadays, and especially out here, people are lacking that — heart. People will step on whoever's toes to get wherever they're going. They will exploit, take advantage, become wolves in sheep's clothing, stab you in the back, and even play both sides of the fence just to look out for themselves. So it's relieving to hear there are still people in the world who want to give in a genuine way — without ulterior motives. We thank Shawn for being that relief as he's writing from Florida State Prison in Raiford, Florida.

All These Thoughts

All these thoughts running through my mind.
Regretting the fact that I chose to commit crime.
Running the street day and night in my life a constant fight.
All these thoughts that's in my head
In being behind these steel bars it's as if I'm dead!
No one writing me any letters,
Each day that pass isn't getting any better!
All these thoughts of where I went wrong
It's as if I'll never make it home
To the family I once had and if my kids still know me as dad.
All these thoughts are starting to make me see things clear
And the fact that I lived a violent life with no fear.
I've made many changes in my life.
And it's because of the fact that I've lost my soul mate.
All these thoughts show me that I've hurt a lot of people.
And the pain that's in my heart goes even deeper.
I know I can't change the past.
But the impression this prison cell has left will last.

Real Talk

Black men are gods and black women are earths. Adherents believe they're the chosen 5 percent of humanity — called five percenters — who live a righteous life. Another 10 percent are said to use this knowledge to exploit the remaining 85 percent of the population, who live in ignorance.

Ghetto Life

There are more guns in my ghetto than jobs. Times are still hard and I can't knock another man's hustle when he's just trying to survive. I can assure you that any race will clash with each other when put in a situation of poverty and violence. The ghetto is not a trend, it's not a video; this shhh is so real that it hurts.

I know what it feels like to be hungry and lose control but I need my race to progress we need you. Arm will continue to expose our plight until the world pays attention. Just look at how rap music took over. If they don't pay attention, our world will eventually become their world and… welcome to the ghetto.

After The Storm

(It hurts so bad that I had to choose if I want to live, or die with her).

To walk away from the hospital after hearing my mother pronounced dead is a strange and naked feeling. I felt as if the front of my clothes had burned away, my flesh was exposed, nasty, seared. 24 years after, the cruel spell of grief has about broken itself now. After this long time, I feel as if I have come back. I like to cry on Mother's Day and holidays. Though I am saddened to think about my mom not being around to do these things, I enjoy the exercise of my emotions, moving through life with all the switches turned on.

And when I'm feeling sorry, as I sometimes do, when I'm mad a the world, I say that I'm glad she's dead. I say that this world is not worthy of her. I can recall each day I shared right up to the last one, and nothing will come to spoil the memories. My mother was a wonderful woman who gave me a gift in her death. I see now that she passed on to me the ideas of heart. It may seem to be simply a functioning organ that pumps the essentials, but I have learned that a good heart will keep me going despite the stress I put on it.

I couldn't fix my mom. No matter how I needed to. Yet she gave me a paradigm for fixing myself. She gave me her heart's strength for a transitional period, the years I needed until I could get strong again. I take care of myself. I believe I am supposed to live long, even prosper, and I believe I have a responsibility to be somebody who cares about others. I don't just believe that. I know it.

Within these walls, this prison, my mind and thoughts run free

I think of mom and days gone by, and of what she meant to me

I wonder how life would have been had she not gone away
And would I be behind these bars, if she were here today?

How would my life be different? I've asked a million times,

If I could only talk to her, she might have stopped my crimes

I'm thankful for the time we had, but she could not have known
Of the dark void left within my life in the years since she been gone

I needed her and miss her. I love her for a fact,

But I know my life is different, because of my final act.

To Whom It May Concern

We were your aspirations
Your hopes and dreams
Now terror and craze is all you claim to see
We were your creations now you're in denial
You stare with criticizing eyes before you embraced with a smile
Shame once bestowed upon you
You now impose on us you say we're doomed to fail
Could that be because you've lost faith in us?
You forget... like you we were yesterdays birth of a new generation Like you, we will become tomorrow's past
But right now, we are today's youth.

Time To Share

I am not a writer, but I do I feel I speak well through my fingers. I've made a 360 degree turn around. Let me show you a little change... this is "freestyle reflecting" to the young. As I begin to write this to no one in particular and everyone who would listen, many thoughts run through my mind.

First, I believe in myself. I believe in unity and don't be surprised, I believe in you. So many of us have been miseducated or led astray from our true course. We have abandoned our heritage of kingship and queenship for that gangbanging and dope dealing. I see the problem... we don't know our history. And without a proper knowledge of our past (Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner) we cannot go forward. If you want to know the end, look at the beginning. How can we stop police brutality, gang violence, and Black on Black crime in our community?

W.E.B Dubois said, "The Negro race is going to be saved by its exceptional..." If I have to die for something, let it be for the truth... but how many of us even know truth? Given our miseducation, many of us cannot distinguish between truth and false hood. So we must first cleanse our minds in order that we may embrace new truths. In addition we need to stop doubting ourselves.

Malcolm X once said, "The greatest crime against the Black man was not slavery or lynching but that he was taught to wear a mask of self hate and self doubt." For as what I said, "We must strive for the best and not the less," we must stop being so wrapped up in ourselves and be one voice accountable to all. After all, united we stand, divided we fall. And collectively we must continue to keep growing in all areas of life: mentally, spiritually, and physically. Stand with me! Everybody that's in prison is not last.

Seven Ways To Improve Your Self-Discipline

1. Believe that you can succeed and set about doing just that. First off, you must have complete faith in your abilities, and courage to take immediate action.

2. Learn to role with the punches. Don't give in to pressures. Don't sweat the small stuff. If you take care of the big things, the little things will take care of themselves.

3. Get busy achieving your goals. If you just do it, get busy following your plans and achieving your goals, you will soon forget why they cannot be done.

4. Always be aware of the positive elements of hope. Don't get into a rut. Hope is life, and life is hope.

5. Have complete confidence in your ability to find a solution to any situation or circumstance. Know that you know that you know. Know that there is always a solution. Reformulate the situation or circumstance in a way that facilitates solution, or resolution. For example, if you are faced with a difficult task, ask yourself, "How can I complete this task and enjoy the experience?"

6. Keep going and growing be excited about your own performances each day. Affirm, "every day in every way, I am getting better."

7. Be a self-starter. Do it now. Do not procrastinate. Don't wait for someone else to ring your bell. Be self-motivated. Start each day with a winning attitude.

JAMES CRAWFORD

Writing from Pelican Bay State Prison's Security Housing Unit (the SHU) in Crescent City, CA, we bring you a Beat veteran we haven't heard from in a long while. We really miss his presence in our pages and you'll see why when you read the two pieces he's publishing this week. The first, "Energy," is a great piece about where people should be spending their energy. Many people believe that you are whatever you put your energy into. So, if you put your energy into the streets, you're probably going to get the results of that energy — incarceration, death, and whatever else comes with the territory. What James suggests is that we refocus our energy into something like volunteering for The Beat Within and we appreciate him for standing up and speaking out about it. For whether you're rich or poor, there are ways in which you can help. He then concludes with a piece about the torturous conditions he's living in back in the SHU. And what was really telling for us is how many institutions he's been in. He lists them as if he's about to shop for groceries and those are the items on his list. We really respect this man's mind and we know you will to, so please read on if you dare...

Energy

As human beings we are truly gifted with a life energy, it is up to every individual how they use their energy. As adult/young adults we will also be held responsible for that energy whether its negative or positive it will be ours to own. This has nothing to do with good or bad, rich or poor because our actions determine what kind of human beings we are, in most cases. We tend to know that the rich pay their way through life, and the poor work their way through and unfortunately this energy creates an imbalance because the rich in the most cases begin to incorporate the slave/master relationship with those they employ or use the poor as the humble slave/servant becomes too grateful, or resentful or overworked.

Life energy is the ultimate power and there is no energy on earth that's greater than human energy. With this understanding we can't hide behind being rich and powerful, or poor and powerless each and every one of us is responsible for working hard. We all will be an example of the energy we put out and if you want to beat someone up or rob someone for what they got or kill someone that energy will be yours to own.

Now if you choose to nurture humanity by caring for the weak and oppressed, and work hard in building a safe and equal society you will own that energy as well. If your like me who have experienced both sides of this energy then you know that the deeds of your actions will definitely be reciprocated. With the understanding it shouldn't be "no" having to ask for volunteers to participating in helping keep a program alive like (The Beat Within) that work exclusively with our troubled youth. The rich/poor should be lining up to volunteer in order to keep this program afloat. From reading their writings over the years its clear a lot of these youths has started to challenge their troubled lives because this is a vehicle for them to express themselves and for us to cry about crime, violence, school drop out rates that's committed by these very same youths who is trying to cry out for help with their integrity still intact will be an outright tragedy for us to let this positive energy die. We must explain, encourage, educate and most of all apply energy into saving the lives of all of humanity especially our youngsters who through the natural evolution of humanity their energy will be our future whether we like it or not and how we treat them will be reciprocated back to us all throughout the world.

I've seen several recent incidents where their energy has begun to show no regards toward their elders, This is reciprocated energy back to us for allowing a energy to exist where our children live in horrible conditions and is neglected, yet we just don't get it so far and far away we are so lets use our energy wisely... volunteer to save The Beat Within by putting our children "first" again this is energy well spent... (energy)

The Short Corridor Infamous Torture Chambers

On Jan. 17, 2007 I was transferred back to Pelican Bay State Prison Security Housing Unit (SHU). As a prisoner who pretty much got 20 plus years of navigating through these prisons with awareness meaning I know my way around whether its to Tehachapi, Corcoran, Salinas, High Desert State Prison, San Quentin, New Folsom, Soledad, and the infamous Pelican Bay. I'll be the first to admit that none of these prisons were (club med) every last one of them are oppressive in every area of their function, yet we as human beings tend to naturally adapt to horrible conditions for our own survival. This adaptation takes on many faces, as we now know from the mental health department that prisoners who suffer from mental health conditions has grown tremendously.

Since these prisons already had in place deplorable conditions in which I had learned how to adapt over the 20 plus years when I got back to Pelican Bay - SHU I didn't expect, nothing that I didn't already know or experience three to four times already, since I had been there, done that originally I was placed in what you call C-1 unit. Which I thought I'll be staying. Now the prisoners around me was saying that they created a new SHU called the short corridor many had their own take for example its for shot callers, political prisoners, who's considered the radical anti-government type, hard liners, those feared by prisoners and staff alike. There was no said criteria for being placed in the short corridor other than every one being labeled or validated as a prison gang member or associates this labeling in itself is questionable. Simply a justification for the torturing of the 200 plus prisoners in the short corridor.

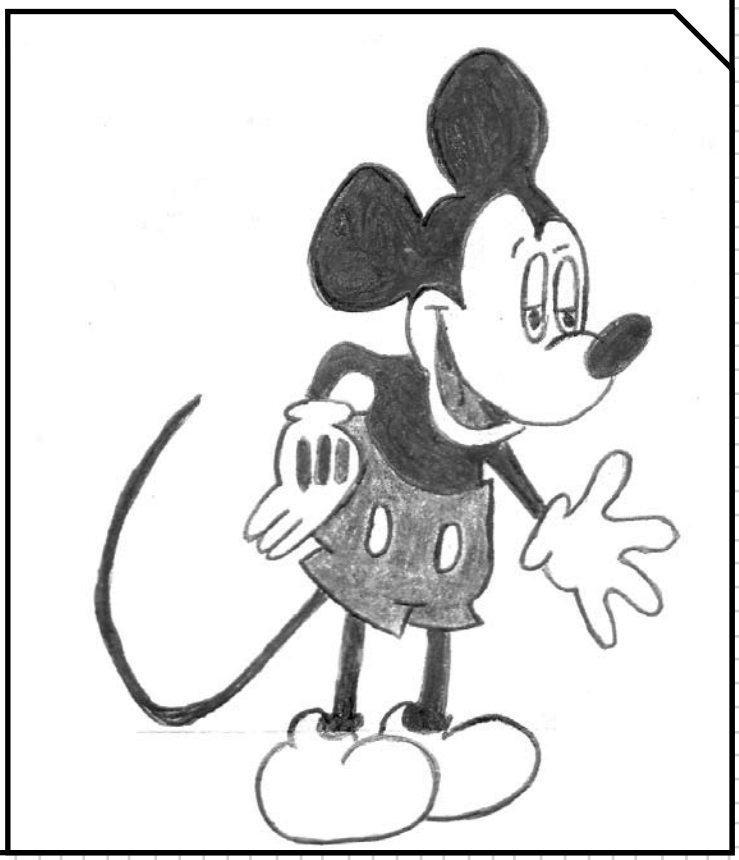
Well I immediately thought since I don't meet the criteria for placement in the short corridor, then I'm good, unfortunately there is no criteria for placement in the short corridor outside of vindictive, retaliatory, emotional obsessed staff who select prisoners for these torture chambers called the short corridor.

Jan. 26th, 2007 a day after being back in PBSP-SHU I was escorted to the short corridor in many ways the short corridor is like Guantanomo Bay. We had already been excluded from the outside world and was making adjustments for that reality so to create another exclusion far worser speaks volumes to how diabolical those who hold us captive can be. This is a progression that will only continue to manifest itself until we're all dead. Many of the short corridor prisoners suffer from serious medical conditions and the reason I labeled it the torture chambers is because imagine someone having you at their mercy and they beat you physically constantly until their burnt out. After that they result to other ways to destroy you by using psychological torturing tactics. This unfortunately has turned out to be more effective than the physical aspects of torturing because it destroys you physically, mentally, and spiritually. Every aspect of your being is under attack. Prisoners are being stressed tremendously, attacks on their families/friends and others has been targeted and subjected to harsh treatment simply because prisoners won't tell the state/federal officials what they want to know. Mail, food packages legal mail, health care, etc all denied.

The short corridor forces prisoners in a cell isolated from their peers, race, and tell them that's your coffin you will die right their in that very cell. Many of us have life in prison, so that reality is not lost on us, unless those who represent humanity get back in power or we all will be dying in some isolated dump, in the world somewhere like so many do today. Yet the short corridor's only reason for its creation is for the purpose of torturing to break the will of the prisoner. So that they will submit to their will. We are isolated from other SHU prisoners D1 through DH has its own everything and we only can be moved with those in the short corridor buildings. If we have family members who are in other prisons, for example mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, etc. If you're in the short corridor you can't write to them. We are told not to talk to no one period enforcing further isolation. On visits there's cameras/recorders and physical presents on top of all that to intimidate you and your family. Trying to destroy the lucky ones who do get visits. The very fact the state can take 200 plus prisoners out of its 170,00 plus and subject them to such treatment speaks volumes to how terrible things has gotten for our so-called country of democracy and freedom.

History is the truth and for many the future, so this reality will soon be yours as well. This is why I say to you youngsters that as hard as it is for me to admit it, many has allowed themselves to succumb to the torture and although there a lot of us who understand psychological warfare those who succumb just didn't get it. If one ain't grounded in substance then outside forces can be the determining factor in whether he/she can survive these harsh treatment and as I said they will continue to manifest as it evolve it will get worser and worser with this understanding I say to you allow yourself to alter your course especially if its on this path to Pelican Bay State Prison. SHU or prison period their all the same we tend to allow our conditions on the streets to define us, this is why many of us who live in impoverished slums, varrios, ghettos automatically get into the cycle of criminality this is the box we must remove ourselves from or it will continue to define us for generations to come.

We can't afford to think someone will save us we must save ourselves or we will simply not be saved. Whether yours 10 to 21 your on your own, unfortunately you're a grown man, so start making good decisions. Because if you don't wise up quick the consequences can be deadly so be smart. One love, one struggle.



. . . it dawned on me: here we were buying bricks to make a wall, but in truth we were actually dismantling a wall, brick by brick the wall that had threatened to divide me from my daughter. Since then I've learned she doesn't want me for what I can give her, for where I can take her, or even for what we can do together. She wants me for me.

read the rest of Shawn Montgomery's BWO piece on page 46